

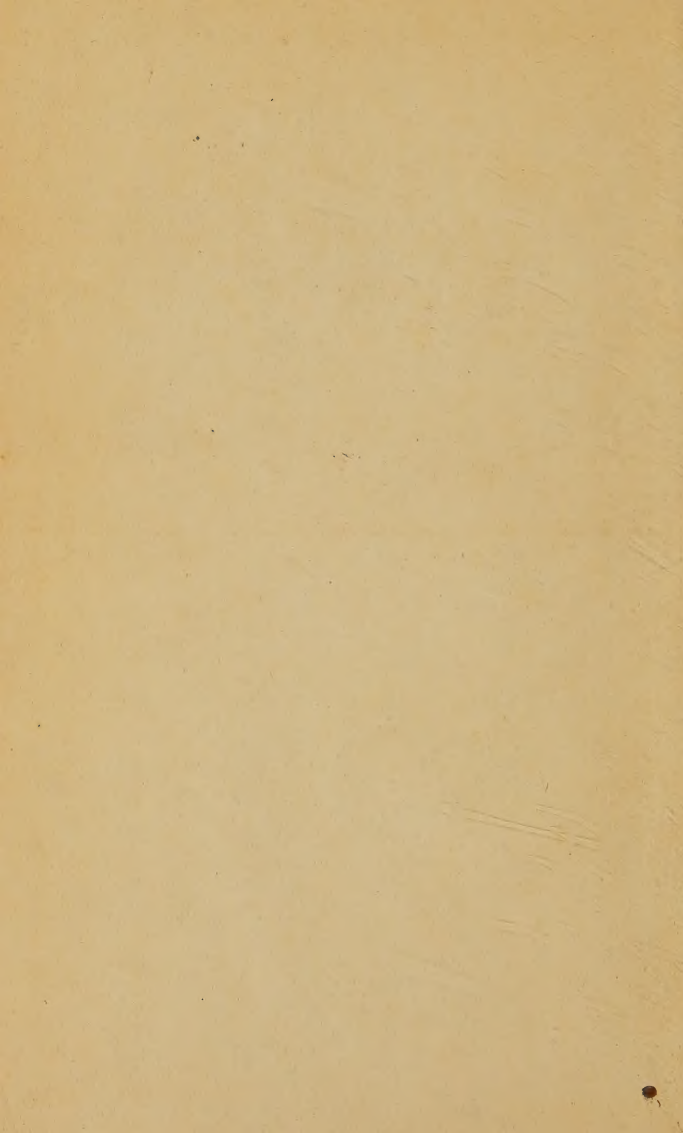
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SIMPLE TRUTH FOR EARNEST MINDS

By NORMAN MACLEOD, D.D.,
ONE OF HER MAJESTY'S CHAPLAINS



ALEXANDER STRAHAN, PUBLISHER
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NOT SAVED.

"The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved."—

JEREMIAH viii. 20.

SALVATION means deliverance. The salvation revealed to us in the Gospel is man's deliverance from sin and all its consequences, by the bestowal of holiness and all its blessings. It is our deliverance from ignorance of God and enmity to God, by the bestowal of that true knowledge of God which is love and life eternal.

Jesus Christ himself teaches us what that most ruined state of ours is, which renders salvation necessary for us ; what God has done through Him to obtain salvation for us, and to impart it to us ; what must be done in us and by us through his Spirit in order to our being saved ; and also

what the blessings are which we enjoy from being saved.

Salvation is not a blessing which we get for the first time when we die, in reward for our being good here. It is not only being delivered from punishment in another world, but being delivered from the evil which brings misery and punishment in this world as well as in the other. It is not the pardon of sin only, but deliverance from the power of sin. It is not only ceasing to do evil, but learning to do well. In one word, as we have said, it is knowing and loving God, for "This *is* life eternal, to know Thee, the only living and true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent." "He that believeth *hath* everlasting life." "Behold, *now* are we the sons of God."

If you understand this, you will further understand that we are now in this present world either saved or not saved. We are at this moment either pardoned or not pardoned, loving or not loving God. There is no middle ground between the two kingdoms of light and darkness, life and death. It is quite true, that not until the last judgment is the whole man, body and soul, for ever lost or for ever saved ; but still, it is here we must

be translated from the kingdom of Satan, or remain Satan's subjects. It is here we must be pardoned and reconciled to God, or remain condemned. It is here we must be born again and made holy, or remain under the power of an evil heart.

Now to every man, who knows that he has a soul, that his soul must live for ever, that his soul must be for ever with God or without Him—what question can be more important than this:—Am I saved or not? If death came this evening to me, should I be found a man saved, or a man not saved?

There can be none; but it is possible, that no sooner is this question suggested for serious consideration, than some one says in his heart, "It is without doubt important, and may be easily put, but how can it be satisfactorily answered? Who but God, the Omniscient, knows those who are saved? For however plausible our reasonings or conjectures on the subject may be, still they are but the reasonings of fallible men, and can be of no value in determining a question, which is after all better left alone." Now I wish you to consider, that however difficult it may be in any case to know

who is saved, it may be very easy in a great many cases to know who are not saved.

It is quite possible that we may not be able to say with certainty of any one man in the world that he is saved, and yet it is equally possible that we may be able to say with absolute certainty of many, that they are *as yet* not saved. When gazing, for instance, on a great multitude of human beings, we cannot with certainty say of any individual before us, that he is in health, although we may be able to say with certainty of many others in the crowd that they are *not* in health. That man who looks so robust and strong, appears to be well, and he may in truth be so ; but it is quite possible that a deadly disease may be lurking in his system, which may speedily lay him in the grave. All we can say with certainty of such a person is, that he appears to be in health, and that, for aught we know, he is so. In his case we may be mistaken. But we cannot be mistaken in the case of that other man with the palsied step and feeble body, or with the pale cheek and hectic flush. He is certainly not in health. Appearances of good health may deceive us ; but in such evidences of bad health we cannot be deceived.

So it is with the state of the soul. We may, in many cases, be deceived with evidences of piety, but we cannot with evidences of impiety. Here, for example, is a man whom we have long known; and the more we have become acquainted with him, the more we have had fellowship with him in public and private—so much the more has the conviction grown upon us, that he is a God-fearing, sincere Christian—or, in other words, that he is saved from the power of evil and living to God. Yet it is possible that in his case we may be deceived. We may have mistaken profession for principle, feeling for faith, hypocrisy for reality. But on the other hand, there are cases of which we can have no doubt. There, for instance, is a man who does not even profess to believe in God or in Christ. He openly blasphemes Christ's holy name, ridicules his words, and rejects Him as the Saviour of Sinners. That man is certainly not saved. There is another man who professes to believe: he goes to church, outwardly joins in its worship; perhaps partakes of the Sacrament, and makes great profession as a Christian. But then, with all this profession, he is known in the market-place to be a dishonest man, or he is given to

habitual lying, or swearing, or drinking, or cruelty, or bad passion, or uncleanness. He is a bad husband, or a bad father, or a bad master; he is, in short, a "worker of iniquity;" and he is certainly not saved. In all such cases there is either the presence of some positive habitual vice which is the sure mark of want of true Christian principle, or the absence of some good which is never wanting in Christians; and this warrants us in saying of such that they are not saved. Far be it from us to insinuate, that such cannot be saved in time to come; all we say of them is, that they are not saved now. Saved they may be, ere the day of grace ends; but if temporal death seizes them while thus dead in trespasses and sins, eternal death must be their portion.

But instead of applying this principle of examination to others, we may apply it much more easily to our individual selves. We have seen how truly we may discover the danger of many around us, whose defects are apparent, whose disease is visible to every eye. Those defects, however, must be apparent before we are warranted in concluding that they exist. When we examine ourselves, on the other hand, we require no such open and glaring

evidence of guilt to enable us to come to a true knowledge of our danger.

We can only judge of others by appearances; but we can judge of ourselves by what we know to be realities, though they may be realities concealed from every eye but the eye of God. Conscience may lift up its awful voice and pass most righteous sentence, and say to us, "Not saved!" when no human voice dare say this of us. We may gather such evidence, from the daily and habitual doings and neglects of the inner man, as may justify us in most truly condemning ourselves, at a time when the doings of the outer man would not justify others in condemning us. Our profession and practice may deceive the charitable, but they are not able to deceive ourselves; they may defy the scrutiny of the world, but their hollowness and want of principle can be speedily detected by the searching eye of our own minds during a few minutes passed in honest self-examination.

Were I, for instance, to say of any of you—that you do not love God; that you do not love Christ; that you are never constrained by love and gratitude to do their will; that you do not love Christians because they are Christians; that you

do not “strive,” or “fight,” or “labour,” or do anything like this to save your soul; that you do not pray in secret; that you are not conscious of ever having gone, as a lost sinner, and pled with God, for Christ’s sake, to pardon you, and to help you with his Spirit to lead a holy life;—were I to say this, you would, possibly, admit that I was speaking the truth. Nay, if I went farther, and charged you with specific acts of sin, habitually committed, while you know that “they who do such things cannot inherit the kingdom of God,” it is possible that conscience would plead guilty to this, as well as to the other charges; and, if so, then it is certain that you are not saved. Open the Word of God, and see if every page does not stamp your outer and inner life as that of one who has not yet known God, who is not yet saved. The conclusion is a very sad and serious one to arrive at; it is not easy for the proud heart to admit it: but, if it is the truth, you are safer with truth the most alarming, than with lies the most pleasing. It is surely much better to know the truth, however painful, in time, than to know it only in eternity. It is surely safer to hear it told you by the ambassador of peace before the throne

of grace, than to hear it before the throne of judgment, where your destruction is certain, your salvation impossible.

I pray you, then, each one in the secret of his own room, or in the silent watches of the night, to think on those words—"not saved," and try to realise their meaning. I know, indeed, that they speak of a loss the full meaning of which none living yet understand. But, nevertheless, by solemn thought, accompanied by prayer for light, and for an upright and understanding heart, you may by faith in God's Word, obtain such a sense of wrong-being towards God, and of consequent danger, as will make you ask in deepest earnestness, "What shall I do to be saved?" The flood is not yet come, though it is coming, ay, slowly rising; you may be now standing on dry land, but you may have some notion of how terrible a thing that flood must be which is to sweep us away. It saddens and softens your heart, when you hear of a noble ship, with all its crew, perishing in the hurricane whose wild and fitful howlings hardly disturbed your sleep of peace. And when some accident has laid an acquaintance suddenly with the dead, and you look

with pity on the mangled corse, and gaze with a shudder upon the pale and well-known countenance, you cannot choose but feel the death of the body to be a solemn thing. Yet what is this to the death of the soul? The loss of the whole material universe is nothing to the loss both to God and to itself of the soul of the poorest man who totters in rags through life's weary pilgrimage. What is the death of the body to the spectacle of a man in prison—a convicted felon, a thief, a swindler, or a murderer? And how awful is the thought of sin continued beyond the grave? How can we measure such a loss as this,—the loss of what is immortal? How get even a glimpse of an evil so vast, so inconceivable! That loss must be dreadful, to prevent which, the Son of God Himself left heaven; dwelt on earth as a man of sorrows; endured sore agony in Gethsemane; submitted to cruel scourgings and mockings before Pilate; and bled, and died on the cross, while the sun was darkened, and the rocks were rent, as He cried, “My God, why hast Thou forsaken me!” Yet all this Jesus did to save souls from being lost! You cannot think that any deliverance, but a great and wonderful one, would make—not the whole inhabitants

of the earth, poor worms of the dust—but the mighty angels in heaven, rejoice? Yet they do rejoice, when the news spreads through heaven, that one soul is saved! Do not such considerations as these, when seriously entertained, help to make you perceive how frightful a calamity it is to be “not saved;” although men themselves, who are most concerned in the matter, may in many cases care little whether they are saved or not!

“The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved!” Do these words allude to the change of seasons merely? Then, they may remind you, that spring with its buds and blossoms, summer with its fruits and flowers, harvest with its crops, and winter with its storms, have in rapid succession come and gone,—that much precious time has passed for ever away, without its being redeemed by you—for you are not saved! Are different seasons of life alluded to? If so, you may be reminded, that the spring time of your life came with its warm affections, fresh hopes, and keen feelings—and it may be with a parent’s advices, and a parent’s prayers,—but you did not “seek God early,” you did not “remember your Creator in the days of

your youth," and soon the season passed, and you were not saved ! Then came summer, the heyday of manhood, bringing more matured experience, a stronger mind, and riper judgment ; but you sought the things of time alone, everything but the one thing needful : and so summer came and went in vain, for you were not saved ! The mellow harvest then arrived, when manhood exchanged the fading features of youth, for the looks of old age, when you should have been gathering the good fruit from the seed sown in spring, and matured in summer. Some fruit, perhaps, you did gather ; the fruit of industry in the comforts of life, or the fruit of honourable dealing in the respect of the world, or the fruit of domestic happiness from domestic love ; but not having sown to the Spirit, no spiritual fruit was gathered—and so the season passed, and you were not saved ! And what ! has winter come ? the winter of life, with its hoary locks and tottering steps, and body bent towards the open grave—and is it true of the old man, as it was of the young man, that he is not saved ? If this season passes like the rest in vain—remember no spring time can return to you. But it is possible that the words may refer to past seasons of grace.

If so, how solemn the reflection, that peaceful sabbaths, holy sacraments, faithful preachings, and earnest prayers, serious advices and stirring warnings, domestic afflictions, sick-beds, deaths, and burials, have all been sent to you in vain—for these seasons have passed, and yet you are not saved! Add to all these the reflection, that while such seasons were passing, you were going farther from God, and becoming more sinful and more guilty—every hour carrying you nearer and nearer the gulf where there is no salvation—and you will not wonder that, in contemplating a state so bad, a condition so alarming, a prophet should exclaim,—“For the hurt of my daughter I am hurt: I am black; astonishment hath taken hold of me.” This is the language of sorrow, the sorrow of one who knows the value of salvation, and the loss incurred by those who are not saved. It is the same kind of grief which filled the heart of St. Paul, when, speaking of the unbelief of his brethren, he said, “I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart.” It was this sorrow for lost souls, which made the Saviour weep over impenitent Jerusalem, saying, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen

gathereth her chickens under her wings, but ye would not."

Let me now suppose, that even one secretly confesses that he has never had such a concern for his soul, as has led him once, in downright earnest, to a throne of grace, seeking salvation—that he certainly lacks the Scripture evidence of being saved, while he possesses too much of the Scripture evidence of being "not saved;" moreover, that he knows and feels his state to be one of evil and of danger: then I ask such a one, "Why are you not saved?" It is true that the summer is past, and that the harvest is ended—that time has fled—life vanished as a vapour, and seasons of grace departed—leaving behind this sad result of—"not saved." It is true, that no language can picture the sin and loss of such a state;—but why is it not otherwise? Why is not the disease removed, and its awful consequences averted? What replies can you make to those questions? What reasons can be given for your continuing in your present state, and not rather obtaining the deliverance which you stand so much in need of?

Do you say, "My disease is incurable. It is

inveterate. It cannot be healed." And what, let me ask, is that disease which the good physician, Jesus Christ, cannot cure? When He was on earth, He healed "all manner of diseases;" He made the blind see, the deaf hear, the lame walk, the dumb speak, He even raised the dead. No one was dismissed by Him as incurable. These cures He effected, not merely to do good at the time, or to prove merely that He came from God, but also to teach the whole world in all ages, what he could do for the bodies and souls of men; to assure us that He could save the soul, and make it see his glory, and hear his voice, and speak his praise, and walk in the way of his commandments—yea, raise it from the very dead. Jesus also cast out demons! You remember, for instance, the case of the demoniac in the country of the Gadarenes, who lived in the tombs, and wandered naked among the mountains, wild, "night and day crying, and cutting himself with stones." No human hand could bind him, for he was possessed of demons. But Jesus cast them forth, though "they were legion;" and the poor man was found "in his right mind," sitting clothed at Christ's feet; and he who was a demoniac became a messenger from God, and told his unbelieving

countrymen "the great things Jesus had done for him!" Such blessed miracles prove to us the comforting truth, that Jesus is more powerful than Satan. He was so then—is He not so now? "All power has been given to Him in heaven and earth."—"Principalities and powers are made subject to Him." You cannot have a worse disease than those poor sinners in Judea had. Therefore, the Physician who was able to save them, is able to save you. I have heard of men who professed to cure with their medicines all diseases which afflict the body. Thousands believed them, and soon found that they believed a lie. But when God offers us this Physician, to cure our souls, alas! how few put their trust in Him!

"I know not," you again say, "if Jesus is willing to heal me. I doubt not his power to heal, for He is omnipotent: but what hope dare I entertain that He will exercise that power in my behalf?" I reply, try Him. Unless you do so, you must perish. If you do so, you may be saved. Granting, for the present, that there is but a chance of salvation—though it is sad to be obliged to speak thus,—yet, if the only other alternative involves the certainty of destruction, common pru-

dence must lead you to the Saviour. "It may be, He will have mercy." You may have uncertain hope of relief from Him if you go; you can have no hope of relief from any one else if you do not go.

But there are stronger reasons to induce you to go to the Physician. Do not his invitations assure you of his willingness? You do not, I trust, think it possible that the Saviour would give an invitation to men which He did not in truth wish them to accept? He does invite every sinner to come to Him, and is consequently grieved, yea angry, when they do not come. "Come unto me all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Do not his commands, as well as his invitations, convince you of his willingness? The commands which are given to men generally, are given to each man particularly. When God gives the general command, "Thou shalt not steal," he commands you not to steal, and wishes you to be honest. "But this is his commandment, that ye believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ." And if He commands you to believe, He wishes you to believe; that is, to be saved through faith in Jesus Christ,

“the Saviour of all men, specially of those who believe.”

How can you doubt his willingness? Is He merciful?—and will He not delight in showing mercy! Is He holy?—and will He not delight in making you holy! Is He the Prince of Peace?—and will He not delight in giving you peace! Is He true?—and must not love seek love alone as its own reward, and delight in shedding it abroad on every heart that will receive it! The willingness of Christ to give every blessing is certain; your willingness to receive the blessing is the only difficulty. Not in Him, but in you alone exists the barrier to your salvation. The willingness of Christ to save is one with his power to save. But remember his own solemn declaration and affecting words to Jerusalem, “How often would I have gathered you, but *ye* would not.”

I read of many who came to the good Physician, weary and heavy laden, for rest; but I read of none who departed without having obtained the desired blessing. No sincere soul ever carried away a burden from the feet of Jesus, except the pleasant burden of a weight of gratitude and love. On one

evening, we are told, "when the sun was setting, all they that had any sick, with divers diseases, brought them unto Him, and he laid his hands on every one of them, and healed them!" Merciful Physician! how willing was He to heal them! Equally willing is He to heal now; for "He is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." Let us take one instance out of many, showing his mercy and love towards the poor and needy, and their ignorance of, and want of confidence in, his mercy and love. When he came down from the mount of Transfiguration, a poor distressed father met him with his sick boy. He had asked the disciples, during their Master's absence, to heal him; but they could not. He now comes to Christ. He gives a touching history of his child's sufferings, telling how he foamed and gnashed with his teeth, and pined away, and how the foul spirit cast him into the fire and water; and then asks the Saviour to help him, saying, "If thou canst do anything, have compassion on us and help us." Now, observe this man's state of mind; he thought the only barrier to his son's recovery was either the Saviour's inability or unwillingness, or both. He had tried the servants in vain, and so his con-

fidence in Christ, the Master, is shaken. "If thou canst," &c., that was with him the only difficulty. But the Saviour shows him his error, by asking, "If thou canst believe?" as if He had said, I can save, but canst thou trust? Canst thou confide in me? This was the real question to be settled between the afflicted father and the Saviour, as it is now the great one to be settled between the anxious sinner and the Saviour. Not, Will the Saviour heal me? but, Can I trust him for healing? The distressed father is thus obliged to feel, that if there was anything to prevent his child's recovery, that obstacle was in his own breast. Accordingly, there is a great struggle between faith and unbelief. He can hardly believe in Christ's power and mercy. Was it indeed true, that he could do this for him, and help him? Was the recovery of that miserable boy "possible," if he believed? But if he finds it difficult to believe this, he finds it more difficult to return to his unhappy dwelling, with his child unhealed. His heart is breaking. He bursts into tears, and cries, "Lord, I believe, help my unbelief!" His confidence is weak, but it is real. The Saviour bends over the boy, who, cast down by the foul spirit to the ground, is writhing in

agony, and, lifting him up, restores him in health to his father !

Or perhaps there are other reasons which prevent you from being saved, that may be profitable for us to examine. May not your indifference arise from thinking that there is no danger? But, if there is no danger, how is it, that the disease under which you labour, is described in such remarkable language in Scripture? Is there no danger in being an “enemy to God ;” a “child of wrath,” because of disobedience ; in being a subject of the “kingdom of darkness ;” in being “condemned already ;” in being “dead in trespasses and sins ;” in being “without God in the world ?” Yet all this is true of you, if you are not saved.

In spite of this you do not, it may be, see or feel anything, in your present state or condition, to alarm you. So have I known men obtain rest from pain a few hours before they died ; ceasing to suffer, while death was seizing their vitals and turning them into the corruption of the grave. So does the sinner often experience most ease, when he is nearest eternal death. But I have also known—and I daresay so have you—men brought

to a sense of their danger, from seeing the concern of others about them. Have you never seen a man become for the first time alarmed about himself, when he saw the faithful physician look anxious, and heard him no longer express good hope of recovery; and when he beheld his family gaze upon him with tearful eyes, or heard their low sobs, which could not be restrained? From these outward signs, he became convinced that something dangerous had befallen him. And thus, too, might the most indifferent sinner be made to conjecture at last that some sore and terrible malady had seized his soul. If he was not in danger of some great, though to him unseen destruction, because of the existence of a great, though by him unfelt, moral disease—why do the great and good angels rejoice when he escapes it? If he is not in danger, how is it that God himself commands, warns, beseeches him to fly? And if he is not in danger, why that sore agony in Gethsemane; that awful scene on Calvary; that dying cry from the Son of God? The danger of the sinner can only be measured by what God has done to deliver him from it. And if there is not inconceivably great danger, because great

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evil, then the inconceivably great things which God has done to save us must have been unnecessary. It is thus that you may be made to know your danger, when you are too blind to know the true nature of the malady which occasions it. When you look within, you may be disposed to cry "peace and safety;" but when you look without, you cannot choose but see that an inevitable destruction awaits the impenitent.

Or it may be that you do not deny the dangerous consequences of this malady of sin—you imagine only that you can escape from them without Christ. But God says, that "there is no other name given whereby we can be saved, but the name of Christ." It is only through Christ's atonement that God will pardon us—and He will pardon those only who will be pardoned in this way. It is the Holy Spirit freely offered and promised to all who receive Christ, who can alone teach us truly to know God's will, and effectually help us to do it. If you refuse to avail yourselves of this appointed method of being healed, and adopt methods which appear to you (in your blind and sinful ignorance!) better and wiser, you are but acting like Naaman the Syrian, who refused

to dip in Jordan at the command of the Prophet, and who like a fool "went away in a rage," saying, "Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may I not wash in them and be clean?" But remember the advice given to this proud and ignorant leper by his servant: "If the Prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldst thou not have done it? how much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean?" He had the sense to do so, and what was the result? "Then went he down, and dipped seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God: and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean!" Go thou and do likewise. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, "by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost."

And all this, it may be, you intend doing—but you see no immediate necessity for applying to the Physician. No immediate necessity! Is it not certain that you are every moment getting worse, and that you never can get better until you go to Christ? Is it not certain that, if left to yourselves, the condition which you so much love

to-day, you will love much more to-morrow? Can you be holy, and enjoy peace, and love Christ, and obey God, too soon? And if you determine to keep that sin one week—one hour—what if God should permit you to have your own way for ever, so that it will for ever possess you? “To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts;” but if you will not hear his voice “to-day,” what if to-morrow the righteous sentence shall be passed—“They hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord; they would none of my counsel, and despised all my reproof, therefore shall they eat the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices”?

But are those the true reasons, after all, which keep most men from seeking the balm that is in Gilead, and the Physician who is there? Are they not rather the mere excuses of a sin-loving soul, which perhaps desires to get rid of the evil consequences of sin, but not of sin itself? It is not unlikely that I truly interpret your feeling, and read aright the wishes of your heart, when I say, that you have no objections to be saved from all the pain and trouble which attend your malady, and

from all the fears of coming agony, if you are only permitted to keep the malady itself; that you have no objection to be cured, provided only the Physician will cure you in your own way;—that you have no objection to be saved from the curse of sin when you die, if you are only allowed to keep “the pleasures of sin” as long as you live. And, accordingly, the language of your heart may be like this, “My disease, I fear, is dangerous; I am afraid of it. I am willing to be healed, but let the cure put me to no trouble, no pain, no self-denial of any kind. Let it be done, in spite of me, by an act of omnipotent power. Save this body from being cast into hell; but do not cut off this hand, or pluck out this eye to save it. Bring me into the safe way that leads to glory; but put me not to the trouble of striving to enter in by a gate so strait, or of walking along a road so steep and narrow. Deliver me from the body of this death! but not by ‘mortifying the body,’ or by ‘crucifying the flesh,’ or by ‘putting to death the old man;’ in one word, cure me, but give me no medicines bitter and disagreeable to flesh and blood, and no operations to pain the flesh!” And thus, alas! we fear, many a man argues in his heart who has light

enough to see the danger of sin, but has no heart to part with it. "Save me from selfishness ; but permit me always to gratify self. Save me from filth ; but let me wallow in the mire. Save me from intoxication ; but let me drink on." Save me from covetousness ; but let me keep my gold. Save me from sloth ; but do not give me anything to do. Save me from a bad temper ; but let me indulge it. Give me strength, but not exercise ; daily happiness, but not daily duty ; patience, but nothing to try it ; faith, but nothing to shake it ; zeal, but nothing to engage it ; weanedness from the world, but no sorrows or afflictions to produce it. I wish light, comfort, and peace, without secret or earnest prayers at a throne of grace ; without the Spirit of God being asked and obeyed ; without hearing, reading, or believing the truth. I wish, in one word, to be a partaker of all the benefits of redemption, to share Christ's glory, Christ's inheritance, Christ's throne : but not to share Christ's holiness and self-denial, Christ's sufferings and cross !" And is this the way in which dying, perishing sinners treat the blood-bought remedy, and receive the offer of eternal life ! Is this the way they deal with the Saviour ? arguing and dis-

puting as if He were an equal ; insulting Him with offered compromises between his awful commands, his merciful invitations, and the desires of a corrupt, evil heart ?

Oh ! where are the souls who are in earnest about salvation ! where the upright souls who will meekly believe God's Word, and humbly and reverently do his will—where are they who will put their trust in the Physician : and, instead of prescribing to Him, be administered to by Him ? Where are they who will truthfully go to Him in confiding prayer, saying,—“ Lord Jesus, we have tried many physicians, and they could not heal us ; we now go to Thee. We are dead in trespasses and sins, poor and needy, blind and naked. The harvest is past, and the summer ended ; yet we, guilty sinners, are not saved. But we are spared ; and we have heard the glad tidings that there is balm in Gilead, and that Thou art the Physician there, able and willing to save to the uttermost all who go to Thee. Our hope is in Thee. We believe ; help our unbelief. Pardon all our sins through thy precious blood ; through thy Spirit help us to die to sin and live to Thee. We give

ourselves, soul, spirit, and body, into thy hands. Send us adversity or prosperity, life or death. Give to us what remedies seem to thy love and wisdom best suited to us, with humble hearts to receive them ; and, for thy great mercy, save now and for ever our poor perishing souls!"

May the Spirit of God, without whose teaching man's teaching is vain, open the eyes of your understanding, that you may know the truth as it is in Jesus; and open your hearts to receive it in love; that believing in Christ, and receiving his Spirit, you may be saved.

PUBLICANS AND SINNERS HEARING CHRIST.

"Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him,"

Ec. Ec.—ST. LUKE xv. 1, 2.

WE are told in the Gospels that "the common people" heard Jesus "gladly." We need not wonder at this. He was one of themselves; for though "He was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor." His parents and kindred were common people; and for years He himself laboured as an ordinary artisan in a small country village. His apostles were poor fishermen. He instructed the common people in every-day language which they could all understand, and taught them when familiarly walking with them along the highway, or seated by the sea-shore, or on the hill-side. He visited them in their towns and rural hamlets.

He sympathised with all their wants and feelings as human beings. He cured their sick, their blind, their maimed, their deaf, and touched with healing hand even their loathsome and outcast lepers. He took the children of the poor into his arms and blessed them. Above all, He preached the Gospel to the poor, and revealed God to them as their merciful Father, through Himself their merciful Saviour. And all this He did with such untiring diligence, profound sympathy, enduring patience, and tender considerateness, that they could not but hear Him gladly, if they would hear Him at all.

The common people nowadays who do not wish to hear Jesus, or about Jesus, are thus very unlike their fellows who knew Him and heard Him gladly when He was on earth. Alas! there are many in our country, and in our great cities, who never heard of Jesus except in oaths; and there are many who dislike Him, because they do not know Him. The Jesus who is in their thoughts is quite a different person from the Jesus whom men were acquainted with long ago, and listened to, loved, and followed; and whom all true Christians know and love as they do no one else. Let me therefore

read the Gospel to you, that you too may come to know the living and true Christ, who is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever—the same to us now as He was to the people among whom He lived and taught, and who heard Him gladly. Let us hear what those who know the Saviour can tell us about Him.

The 15th chapter of St. Luke's Gospel sheds a flood of light on the love of Jesus not only to the common people, but to the very worst amongst them, and therefore to all sinners until the history of the world ends. And this love enables us to understand why the common people, and even the more depraved among them, were drawn towards this Divine teacher and mighty Saviour.

The first thing which arrests our attention in this chapter is the fact that publicans and sinners drew near to hear Christ. The words in the original convey the impression that this was their habit—that they were continually about Him, or came habitually to hear Him.

Who were these Publicans and Sinners?

The "publicans" were, from their very office, held in scorn and abhorrence by the Jews: for their office, affording as it did temptations to

avarice and to dishonesty, led many of them to be heartless extortioners and oppressors.

It is more than likely that there was a publican in the audience who knew that he had often acted a most cruel part to the poor, treated the widow and orphans without mercy, emptied houses of their food and furniture, and sold both to feed his own luxurious appetite, and to fill his own pockets. How can such a man draw near to the righteous Jesus?—to the loving self-sacrificing Jesus, who was rich, yet for us became poor, and whose “saying” it was, that “It is more blessed to give than to receive?”

There were doubtless notorious sinners in that audience, persons guilty of open violation of God’s laws. There were among them, perhaps, godless parents who had no mercy on their children, but brought them up as godless as themselves; husbands and wives who had been quarrelling and fighting, so that their homes were the scenes of confusion and every evil work; thieves, who had stolen in a night what honest men laboured for many a day with the sweat of their brow to obtain; dissolute people, who to please themselves had ruined others, and sacrificed everything which came

between them and the basest gratification ; unblushing cheats, who never paid for what they got, either in work or goods ; young men and women old in sin ; old men and women, like extinguished furnaces, with their fires burnt out, and their ashes alone remaining ; smooth and plausible hypocrites, inventing stories, telling falsehoods, and deceiving kind, confiding people, in order to live in sloth, and feed their appetites and passions without trouble. And many more whose sin possibly had not broken out into crime, but who were without good and without peace, because without God in the world.

No doubt there were some who were condemned more for their profession, and their social connexions, than for their actual conduct, and were far less wicked in the estimation of God than in that of their fellow-men ; for men judge only by appearance, and are ever prone to condemn those whom others condemn, as well as to pass harsh judgment upon their neighbours : but God “ knoweth our frame,” our temptations, all that goes to form our character, and judgeth righteous judgment. Among those “ publicans ” there may have been more than one Zaccheus—men both just and

generous. And among those "sinners" there may have been several "striving against sin." But does it not appear strange to find that such persons should draw near to Christ for to hear Him? We are, perhaps, disposed to wonder at their conduct, and to think that they of all people would rather have avoided his presence, and have refused to hear Him.

Well, it is true that there was a great gulf between them and Jesus Christ. He and they were so different in character, and so opposite in all they knew and loved. They were ignorant of God; He knew Him. They were at enmity with God; He loved Him. They made the pleasing of themselves the end of their being, and their own wills the rule of their lives; He "pleased not Himself," but pleased to do always what was right, and therefore to do the will of Him that sent Him. They accordingly had no peace; but his peace was perfect.

But while such a revelation of a holy character, as contrasted with their own, would at first probably kindle in them bitter feelings, or fill them with fear, we can see on the other hand, how, when they heard Him speak words full of grace and

truth, such as man never spake before ; when they came to know Him better, to understand his character, to perceive his feelings, towards themselves, and to learn why He had come into the world, they would draw nearer to Him, and cling to Him with a more eager longing and brighter hope. For you will observe that the very character of Jesus, which separated Him from sinners, as sinners, was what drew Him towards sinners, as sufferers, and drew sinners towards Him. His character, like that of God, with whom He is one, was Perfect Love. He, and He alone of all the sons of men, loved the Lord his God with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his mind, and with all his strength, and his neighbour as Himself ; and He has told us, moreover, in the parable of the Good Samaritan, who his neighbour is, even every man. It was this love which made Him hate all that crushed, blinded, and destroyed those who, as human beings and his own brethren, were dear to Him. It was this love which filled Him with unutterable pity towards the fallen, a pity which was seen in his every look, heard in every word that fell from his lips. This pity was shown in even his severest rebukes ; for there are

no rebukes so severe as those of pitying love—no wounds so painful, yet so healthful, as those given by a true friend.

Then, again, the pure and true love of Jesus could alone comprehend the real nature of the sin which was in those sinners. Strange though it may at first appear to you, yet so it is, that a bad man cannot understand a bad man as well as a good man can do. A man loving sin may know as a fact the sin which another loves, but he does not know either his own or another's sin *as* sin, and as such therefore vile, and deserving the curse of God. The dishonest, the selfish, the proud, do not know the real evil of dishonesty, selfishness, and pride, as the honourable, the loving, and the humble-minded do. The pure alone can comprehend the vileness of impurity; the loving alone can truly see the hell that is in hate. And accordingly the worse a man is, the less does he know how bad he himself is, and others like him are. He is in too great darkness to see those who are in the midnight of sin. Nay more, the good alone can sincerely desire to deliver others from the evil which once crushed and tormented themselves, and the remains of which are still so hateful; and

they alone can seek with their whole hearts to make others share that good which they themselves possess, and rejoice in. And do we not therefore feel, that if we ourselves were living wicked lives and feeling miserable in them, we would not and could not open our hearts to those as bad as ourselves. To those only would we go who were acquainted with God, and sought to please Him—who had found peace with Him, and freedom in his service. We should feel that they alone could understand us, pity us, and do all in their power to deliver us; while others would more likely be indifferent to our fate, laugh us to scorn, try to keep us as we were, or make us worse.

Thinking over all this we shall cease to wonder that publicans and sinners drew near to Christ. And oh! what thoughts would arise in their hearts when they actually saw Him and listened to Him! As they heard Him saying, “Come unto me all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” As they beheld his countenance beaming kindness and good-will to all. As they saw the deeds of mercy and the wondrous healing which came from his looks, his hands, and his very garments. As they listened to his awful and

righteous rebukes of evil, pronounced without fear of men against all classes, not excepting the powerful and the so-called religious, mingled with his tender and touching invitations, without exception, to every man to come unto Him for life,—then would a sense of sin begin to stir in their minds, and a discovery be made of their own darkness in the presence of this light of life; and a conviction of death and corruption would be quickened by the words of Him who was the resurrection and the life. We can indeed well conceive how these publicans and sinners would say to themselves somewhat in this manner—“We never met any one like this! We never met any one who had such love to God, and peace with God, as this man, or who could read our very souls as He can. We never met any one who longed as He does to deliver us from evil, and to restore us to our God and to ourselves. Oh, if there is any one on earth who knows us, feels for us, pities us, and can help us, this is the man! To Him or to no one can we confess our sins, and tell our misery, our weakness, our emptiness of heart, and utter hopelessness. Jesus Christ, to Thee we come: have mercy on us and help us!”

And there was another reason why those publicans and sinners drew near to Jesus, and it is this:—that Jesus did not appear among men, revealing to them their sins and lost condition, or merely pitying them, but He appeared as one sent from God with authority and power to pardon their sins and to deliver them from them. No doubt *the way* in which He was to do this—by his atoning death and all that followed, including the gift of his Spirit—was not at that time so fully revealed to them as it was after his death and resurrection, and as it is now to us in the Gospels. But the fact was clear enough that He did not come only to show people how diseased they were and how deadly were their diseases, but also to heal them and give them perfect health. He did not preach guilt only, but pardon also; not sin, but holiness also, with power to become holy; not death, only as the wages of sin, but through Him that eternal life also which is the gift of God. He did not say merely, “Behold, what I am, and in this see and learn what God wishes you to be; and behold yourselves also what you have become through sin;” but He also said, “Behold what I am, and understand that this is what you may be, must be, or perish,

Behold in my character and in my peace what I have come to bestow upon you, and what the worst of you will most surely become who believes in me, and will be taught by me,—as sure as I am the way, the truth, and the Life ! Behold me, and in me behold the Lamb of God, promised and now come to take away the sins of the world : ” — “ for God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world ; but that the world through Him might be saved. He that believeth on Him is not condemned : but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.”

This was the gospel of the glad tidings of the grace of God, the message of peace on earth and good-will to men, with glory to God in the highest, which Jesus preached by word, life, and act, by every sign and miracle of power and love. And publicans and sinners felt that what He gave was

what they needed ; and desiring to see it more clearly and to possess it more surely, they followed Jesus and heard Him gladly.

We next read, in this 15th chapter of St. Luke, that the Scribes and Pharisees murmured against Jesus, because He treated publicans and sinners with so much friendliness.

But let us ask, what kind of people were those Scribes and Pharisees ?

The Scribes were the chief expounders of the Law of Moses, (which had to do with both Church and State,) and were the most learned men, in a sense, of their time, and very probably despised publicans and sinners, because, as they would say, they were stupid ignorant people, without either rank or learning, and therefore quite beneath notice. What should publicans and sinners know about the Christ ? What right had they to countenance this Jesus and to listen to Him as a teacher sent from God, without consulting the Scribes on so important a matter ? Ought they not to have asked such high authorities, if it was indeed light which they, poor ignorant people, saw with their own eyes, before presuming, without the authority of the

Sanhedrim, to affirm that it was light, and rejoice in it? And the Scribes were the more angry still with Jesus, because, professing to be a great prophet and teacher sent from God, even the expected Messiah, He had, instead of addressing Himself exclusively to the would-be scholars of the time, demeaned Himself by preaching to, and associating with, this rabble of publicans and sinners.

The Pharisees, like the Scribes, were the so-called religious people of the time ; esteeming themselves, and themselves alone, as the thoroughly orthodox. Their outward life was wonderfully “religious ;” so that those who could not see beneath the surface, and who mistook outside show for inside reality, shadow for substance, were immensely impressed by them, looked up to them as the most pious people in the country, recognised them as the true guides in all religious opinions and practices, and feared almost to smile in their holy presence. To be esteemed a thoroughly good man it was thought necessary to believe thoroughly just as the Pharisees believed ; to walk, and look, and speak, and pray as they did ; to condemn what they condemned, and praise what they praised—all of which we need not say was as foolish as it

would be for a man to let another person hear and see for him. This was of course an easy kind of religion, as it saved much trouble, and also much personal exertion. But it had this great drawback, that it was no religion at all.

The general character of these Scribes and Pharisees, with their slavish and superstitious followers, was that they made an immense work *about* religion, without having any true religion itself. They were religious without religion. They mistook the means of religion for religion itself. They sat down on the steps of the ladder, instead of ascending by them. They worshipped forms, ordinances, doctrines, opinions, phrases, words, while ignorant of the living and the true God. They went to the temple, but not to God; said their prayers, but did not pray, having no fellowship with God; kept the law to the letter, but knew not love to God and man, which is the fulfilling of the law. They looked humble, but were eaten up with spiritual pride, esteeming themselves and utterly despising others.

There were different degrees of this kind of character among those Pharisees. Some were moral men, living purely and regularly, according to the

light which they had kindled for themselves. Such was Paul, who, when persecuting true Christians, honestly but erroneously believed that he was doing God a service. Hear what he says of this old life, which looked to him at the time to be so religious, but which he afterwards condemned as a life “in the flesh”:—“Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the Church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.”

Now, such a Pharisee even as this would naturally feel genuine pain in seeing Christ eating with publicans and sinners. Judging according to *his* conscience, he could not comprehend it. It was not that he saw and hated such love as Christ manifested, but that he could not see it at all, being blind. It was beyond the powers of his small contracted eye to see how Christ could eat and drink with publicans and sinners, sympathising with their wants and misery, yet not sympathising with their sins; nor could he see, what the world had never before seen, the marvellous love that thus met them as human beings far down, in order

to raise them high up as Christians. Such an one would mistake Christ's intercourse for fellowship, and be unable to understand how He could become all things to all men, but only to gain some. All this Paul learned afterwards, when he "learned Christ."

But there was another class of Pharisees, who, with all their religious knowledge and profession, were essentially hypocrites in God's sight, though singularly pious in their own and in their superstitious neighbours' estimation. These were the men who, marvellous to say, professed to honour the Bible more than Him of whom, nevertheless, Moses and the Prophets spoke ; and to love the Sabbath more than Christ—the Sabbath which pictured the rest that He was to give to sinners ; and who were alarmed and grieved because God's own Son did not honour his Father and his ordinances as they did ; and who for God's glory at last crucified Jesus as a blasphemer, yet on the day of crucifixion were so conscientious as to be afraid to enter the Judgment Hall lest they should be polluted by contact with the Gentiles ! It was of these the Saviour spoke when He said, "Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites ! for ye compass

sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves.—Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone. Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat and swallow a camel.—Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess. Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also.—Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity."

These men are the representatives of too many in every age of the Church, who, whether ministers or members of the Church, mistake the form for the substance, the letter for the spirit, phrases for

things, profession for practice, knowledge for obedience, and things about religion for religion itself : men who may be very conscientious, yet very ignorant ; men very loud in the profession of their love of truth and zeal for God's honour, yet false and malicious in their hearts ; men who, in one word, forget that religion in its sum and substance is, as has been already said, love to God and man, such as never was or can be except through faith in the living Christ, and through the power of his indwelling Spirit.

All these Pharisees murmured at Christ for eating and drinking with such wicked, bad people as publicans and sinners. Had He made his court to themselves—had He asked their advice and opinion with becoming deference—He would have been called all that was good. Alas, for such vain, proud, selfish, ambitious people ! They were much farther from the kingdom of heaven, and in infinitely greater danger, than were the poor publicans and sinners whom they despised.

Here I pause in the exposition of this narrative to give one or two advices from what has been said.

One is : never to delude ourselves with the idea that any amount of talk about religion, or, as the phrase is, “making a great work” about even its doctrines or practices—or making great sacrifices of time, labour, or money for some “religious cause”—or having a name for being “very strict,” or “very particular,” or “very religious,” or “very conscientious”—*necessarily* proves that we have any real religion. There may be fasting without repentance; the words of prayer without its spirit;—much given, and much done, for our sect, party, or church, yet nothing done for God; proselytism and bringing persons to ourselves, yet no bringing of them to God; the idolatry of a religious system with practical atheism. Christ tells us what true religion is—“This *is* eternal life, to know Thee the only living and true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou has sent.”

Hear what the holy Apostle Paul says:—“Though I speak with the tongue of men and of angels, and have not love, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not love, I am

nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing. Love suffereth long, and is kind ; love envieth not ; love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil ; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth ; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things."

Let this be the test of the reality of religion in ourselves and others,—love with its fruits. There are many means, many instrumentalities, to impart religion to the soul, but there is only one religion. There are things innumerable which help us to it, but this is the thing itself.

On the other hand, let us beware of calling men Pharisees, who are strict in the performances of what are styled religious duties. Very likely the world would now call such a man as the Apostle Paul a Pharisee, merely because he was separated from the world, and condemned the world, while he wept over the world ; because he was one with Christ in holiness and love.

Again : if we discover by the light of truth that

the *form* which evil has taken in our minds is not that of the Scribe or Pharisee, but rather that of the publican and sinner, not evil in the spirit so much as evil in the flesh, and visible therefore to all—let us not, I say, in such a case be kept back from going to Christ by the harsh judgments which may be passed upon us, nor by the hypocrisies, inconsistencies, and manifold evils of professing Christians. It is a common excuse, with those who are careless and ungodly, to assert that many professing Christians are as bad as themselves, and that there are to be found numbers of even so-called “religious” people who are not better but often worse than others. Suppose all this were true, and that genuine Christians were rare and seldom met with—though, after all, publicans and sinners are the least likely to meet them, or, if they met them, the least able or willing perhaps to recognise their goodness, or have any sympathy with them—yet why should this hinder sinners from drawing near to Jesus Christ? Why should Scribes and Pharisees stand in the way of their doing so now any more than then? It is Christ Himself on whom we each depend for every blessing, to whom each man is responsible, with whom we have each

to do. And if you admit that to be like Him must be very heaven and blessedness itself, then surely it must be right to draw near to hear Him ; to become his disciple and learn of Him ; to *try* Him at least, if it were even a *may be* that He will draw near to us, and treat us as friends, and pardon all our sins, and share with us his own glorious and blessed life and character, to be our own for ever !

Once more : there was one important point for us in which those publicans and sinners who came to hear Christ differed from the Scribes and Pharisees. It was this—that they *knew* themselves to be sinners, and had some real sense of their need ; whereas the others were ignorant of their state, and satisfied with themselves. The one knew that they were wretched and miserable, poor and blind and naked ; and so they came to Christ for gold to make them rich, and raiment to clothe them, and eyesalve that they might see. But the others, who were in God's sight as ill off, said, “We are rich and increased in goods, and have need of nothing.” The one, therefore, hungered and thirsted after righteousness ; the others were already satisfied with their own righteousness. The

one said, we are in darkness and wish light; the others said, "We see," and so "their sin remained." Both were sick: but the one knew it, and drew near to the Divine Physician; but the others knew it not, and thought they were "whole," requiring no such aid. The poor in spirit were therefore fed, while the "rich" were sent empty away.

Blessed indeed are we if, like the publicans and sinners, we hunger and thirst after Christ! For it is not sin which hinders Christ from helping us, but ignorance of sin, or contentedness with sin, that refuses his help. It is not our poverty of spirit, but our pride; not our weakness, but our imaginary strength, which separate us from our Redeemer.

There are many, alas! so thoroughly satisfied with themselves, with their beliefs, and with their lives, that they will not give Christ a hearing. If they do so, it is not to believe what He says, but rather to tell Him what He ought to say; not to receive from Him what He gives, but to reject it if not agreeable to their preconceived notions and likings. They would treat Christ as an equal, not as their Divine Teacher, and so their hearing of

Him is ever mingled with murmurs against Him. Like Naaman the Syrian, because He will not help them in their own way, they go away in a rage, saying, like him, "I thought," instead of submitting to the thoughts and words of God.

And how often are those who profess to believe in Him, to honour and obey Him, so deceived by their very knowledge and profession, as never to perceive how all that is truly good in man is bestowed by Christ's grace, received by faith in Him, and maintained by abiding in Him through his Spirit. We are proud self-worshippers! But God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace unto the humble. He knoweth the proud Sadducee or Pharisee afar off, but draws near to humble penitents, though they be publicans and sinners.

Yet if we would only draw nearer to Christ to hear Him, and earnestly believe in Him as a teacher sent from God who cannot lie, then should we learn from Him what would save our souls. He would teach us, and quicken in us a sense of guilt which He alone through his blood can pardon, and reveal to us a nature so corrupt that He alone through his Spirit can renew and sanctify it; and open up to us a heart so empty that He alone can fill it. By

thus drawing near in earnestness and humility to hear Him, we should be taught at once, to realise our wants and to receive his supplies; to see our lost and hopeless condition without Him, and our blessedness in the possession of Him now and for ever as our Lord and Saviour. Let all at least try this Saviour.

THE LOVE OF JESUS CHRIST FOR SINNERS.

“What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it,” &c. &c.—
ST. LUKE XV. 4-10.

THE fact of Christ loving all those who love Him, is admitted by every professing Christian. But what I fear many doubt, is his love to those who as yet neither love Him nor trust Him. It is true indeed that Jesus Christ has a special love to the one class of persons which He has not to the other; for He approves of and sympathises with the state and character of the one as right, though imperfect, while He cannot but condemn and dislike the state and character of the other as utterly wrong; yet it is equally certain that He so loves the worst

man on earth as to pity his lost and miserable condition; and has so loved the whole world that He gave his life to save the chief of sinners.

It is this wondrous good-will to men who have as yet only ill-will to Him, which perplexed the Pharisees, and which sinners find so difficult to understand or to believe. It is this free grace which at once condemns our unbelief and enmity, and yet is the only means of our deliverance from both. For there can be no deliverance for us out of unbelief into sincere trust in Jesus, and consequently out of guilt and misery into reconciliation and peace with God; out of suspicion and dislike, into confidence and true affection; out of wilful disobedience, into the cheerful doing of his will,—unless there is first of all an assured confidence in the reality of Christ's love to us, a love as real, even when it is unknown to us, as is the mother's love to her babe who is yet unconscious of its existence. The thought that the Saviour of mankind is indifferent to us, or—oh, dreadful!—hates us, can only produce corresponding feelings on our part towards Him. We may acknowledge indeed that *if* we only loved Him, He would *then*, but not till then, love us! but in vain we ask what

in the mean time is to produce this love in us? What fire can kindle the wood on the altar, and enable us to offer up the sacrifice of a loving, adoring, and thankful heart? Faith in the love of Christ to us can alone do this! We can only cast our care on Him when we know that He verily careth for us; we can only love Him as a Divine Saviour when we see and believe that He has first loved us as lost sinners.

Let us look at this all-important truth from another point of view. When an anxious, earnest soul asks us—perhaps, like the thief on the cross, in his dying hour—“What must I do to be saved?” we reply, in the blessed and oft-repeated words, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and *thou* shalt be saved.” But should the inquirer, from the very earnestness of his spirit seeking rest, push his inquiries further, and ask, “But what am I to believe about Jesus Christ?” “Who is He that I should believe in Him?” “What is He to *me*?” “What does He know about *me*, or care for *me*?” “What will He do for *me*?” To such questions, (which are often put where ignorance of Christ, or a false impression of Christ, have not frozen the soul into the indifference of hope-

lessness or despair,) what reply can we give? If we speak merely of the love and good-will of Christ to some persons, we know not to whom, although it may be to millions of the human race, this assurance is not enough to give peace to the anxious and doubting heart, or to afford a ground for his personal confidence in Christ. The reply is not sufficiently explicit to satisfy the soul thus hungering and thirsting after the living God. There are moments when a man specially feels the awful importance of his own being, the infinite value of his own individual soul, with all its capacities for good or evil, joy or sorrow; moments when eternity has a meaning which makes this life, with all its doing, enjoying, and suffering, appear of no value except as seen in the light of the infinite future. And at such times the sinner asks, with increasing anxiety, "Can you tell me if Jesus cares for *me*? Has He good-will to me? Dare I trust Him, and peril my immortal soul on Him, as St. Paul did, or any other saint or fellow-sinner? For what is it to me though Jesus loves millions, unless He loves myself? They may love Him in return, I cannot. They may bless Him, I cannot. They may thank God

for their creation, I can but lament the day of my birth. They may rejoice, I cannot. Whatever value they may be to Christ, my own soul, my own eternal good and happiness, are to *me* of more value than the whole universe: for if I am cast out of the heart of Christ, I cannot share the good or joy of the universe. It is, and must for ever be to *me*, a hell!" All this mode of looking at salvation may be called by some, who fear nothing because they believe nothing, a mere selfish anxiety about one's own safety. But so might the same judgment have been passed on the words of our Lord, "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"

We may argue as we please against such conclusions, anxious questionings, and tormenting fears; but, whether expressed or not, they must in some such form possess the spirit of every man who attaches any real meaning to the *facts* of his history, to sin, guilt, responsibility, death, judgment, and eternity, while as yet ignorant of, or not believing in, the love to himself of the ever-living and all-sufficient Redeemer of mankind.

It is also quite possible that many plausible arguments may be devised and framed out of Scripture itself, to persuade sinners, that in their present state they are practically alone in the world, without a Father and without a Saviour. But there are certain things we must cling to with the grasp of dying men, and never let them go—no, not if an angel in heaven commanded us to do so,—and one of these is, the love of Jesus Christ to us as sinners; his desire, sincere, deep, beyond our feeble comprehension, as his love is above ours, that we should personally trust Him as our Saviour, and through Him be delivered for ever from all evil, and made holy, loving, and joyful in God, as He Himself is. He who loses his faith in this, has nothing else to save him. His last anchor of hope is gone, and he must make shipwreck of his soul.

But we need not speculate on so important a question as the relationship of our Lord to sinners, but come to the Gospels, and there learn “his mind” and what his thoughts and purposes are in regard to us. The Gospels introduce us, so to speak, to Jesus Christ. They tell us *about* Him, what He, the Son of Man, said and did to

us his brethren; what He revealed about Himself to mankind: so that from thus knowing *about* Him, we may be brought to *know* Him personally, through prayer, obedience, and fellowship with Him, as our own Saviour, of whom we can at last say, "I know whom I have trusted,"—"I have heard of Thee with the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth Thee."

Now we have in the 15th chapter of St. Luke, from the first part of which I last addressed you, a most clear and glorious revelation of the love of Jesus Christ to *sinners*. For when those proud self-righteous Pharisees of whom I spoke to you, and who thought themselves favourites of Heaven,—when the learned Scribes also, who made a god of their theological knowledge, murmured against Jesus for eating and drinking with *sinners*, instead of confining his intercourse to themselves,—not indeed to save them (for that kindness they thought quite unnecessary), but to do them honour,—then the Lord replied to them, by telling them three parables or stories which illustrated truths about Himself, the most precious we can ever learn in this world,

"What man of you," he said, "having an hun-

dred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost. I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance. Either what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it? And when she hath found it, she calleth her friends and her neighbours together, saying, Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost. Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth." And then He added the parable of the Prodigal Son, which you may read for yourselves, the most glorious story ever written, and which has been in every age a precious gospel to poor wanderers, bringing back multitudes of them to their father's home.

The answer contained in these Parables to the captious and ignorant murmurers is very obvious. It is as if Jesus had said, "Would you blame the shepherd for seeking to save his lost sheep? And if not, why murmur against me for seeking to save lost sinners! Is not a man better than a sheep? Would you blame the woman for searching in the dust for her lost piece of silver? And if not, why murmur against me for searching diligently amidst the dust of earth in order to recover lost sinners! Is not a sinner, though a sinner, more valuable than silver?" And then, in the Parable of the Prodigal Son, He opens up the misery of a lost son and the abiding love of a father's heart, and would thus ask, as it were, the heart of every son and every father, be he Pharisee or Scribe, whether he could blame that father who thus met afar off, embraced, and restored to his heart and home his miserable prodigal child? And when no one would or could murmur against such pitying love, Jesus would let their own consciences explain how they could murmur against his Father in heaven for seeking to save, and for desiring to receive back to his heart, the lost member of his family.

But let us enter a little more fully into the teaching afforded by these Parables as to the profoundly interesting point before us—the love of Christ to sinners.

First of all, do they not teach us that lost sinners are a *loss to Jesus*? This is not the thought of sinners. They are willing to admit that their loss is a loss to themselves, a loss of good and of happiness, but they never think, and cannot bring themselves to believe, that their loss is a loss to Christ.

Now when we wish to know of anything which is lost—a lost sheep, a lost piece of money, or a wandering child—we ask to whom did it belong? who is its owner? When we discover the owner we discover the loser. Who, then, is our owner? To whom do we belong?—ourselves? Surely not! Do we, then, belong to the devil? If so, we should not rob even Satan of his lawful property, but render unto this Cæsar the things which are his, and yield ourselves into his hands. But we belong neither to him nor to ourselves. We have a very different owner. We belong to Jesus Christ. He has created us, preserved us, and redeemed us. We are the sheep of his pasture; his pre-

cious treasure; his family; and therefore our loss is a loss to Him. One soul lost is a sheep lost out of the fold, which, but for man's wicked wanderings, would include every man; it is precious coin lost from God's treasury, which, but for man's robbery, would include every man; it is a child lost out of that family which, but for man's prodigal spirit, would include the whole family of man!

It seems to me to be a very awful thing, and a loss of all faith in Christ's character and work, to entertain the thought of his indifference to any man, and to imagine that it is "all the same to Him" whether a being, whose "chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him for ever," is lost or saved. Yet in this same spirit of selfish ignorance have I heard a prodigal speak of his sin and suffering with such phrases as, "It is my own affair, my own look-out; if I sin, I alone suffer: it is all the same to others, though not to myself!" Oh! could he only see, and had he a heart to understand, the misery which his loss has created in his parental home! He is bringing down the grey hairs of a father to the grave. The mother who bore him, and loved him ere he could

know the existence or unconquerable strength of her affection, has no rest day or night, thinking of her outcast boy, and pouring forth her soul in agonising prayers, as she would her life-blood in death, to bring him back again to her heart and home. His sisters mourn for him beneath the dark cloud of his sin and shame, and ever behold him as a spectre in their path;—yet he consoles himself by saying it is his own affair only! What to him is his sin or suffering when compared with what they are to those who truly love him! And what is a sinner's loss to himself, viewed as a human calamity, in comparison with what it is to Christ? This was the sorrow which was his heaviest burden while on earth,—this vision of sin, this sense of its vileness and crime, in the souls of those whom He loved. It was this which made Him weep as nothing else ever did, and caused that bitter anguish on the memorable week of his last passion, when, grieving over lost Jerusalem, He uttered words of pitying love which might melt the hardest heart, and banish every doubt of his love to lost sinners. “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often

would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not." "If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes." And it is this sorrow of our Lord and Brother—this sense of loss to Himself of those whom He would have saved but could not, *because they would not be saved*, which affords so terrible a picture of the wickedness of unbelief. It makes us ask with earnestness, how dare a sinner lose his soul? How dare he act such impiety before high heaven, as to use the sacred gift of his own will to choose what is against God's will; to choose *sin*, and with sin enmity to God, and with enmity the loss of love to God, and with the loss of God the loss of all? How dare he shut out the light from his soul and prefer the darkness? How dare he say to God, I will not have eternal life in the knowledge and in the love of Thee? How dare he reject the name in which he was baptized, and refuse to be a child to God his Father, through Jesus his Saviour, and by the power of the Spirit his Sanctifier, and thus refuse to give the Holy Trinity the glory and joy of saving him? How

dare he add one lost immortal soul to the dread kingdom of evil and darkness? And then, when he has dared to do all this, to add to his evil by charging God with it, and saying, "*I would, but thou wouldst not!*" Oh, let the love of Christ at once make him tremble with fear, when remembering his sin, and rejoice with joy unspeakable when remembering his Saviour!

I notice, secondly, that Jesus Christ is *seeking to save sinners*, even as the shepherd sought the lost sheep, and the woman the lost piece of silver. Jesus does not retire into mysterious darkness to be sought for by the sinner, as if He were unwilling to be found. But He comes forth searching for his sheep—for all who will hear his voice and follow his steps. And thus while He is found of all who seek Him, how often is He "found of those who sought Him not," but whom He Himself has sought and found?

And in how many ways, in what sundry times during life, and in what divers manners, does the Lord search for us! Could we indeed understand all his "ways," we would doubtless discover Him continuously dealing with us in a thousand forms in which at present we see Him not. Jesus comes

to us in what we call Nature, though it is but the channel of the supernatural. Thus the heavens declare *his* glory, and the earth is full of *his* glory, though we see it not. He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good ; sendeth his rain on the just and on the unjust ; He is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil ; He “never leaves Himself without a witness, in that He does good, and gives rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with joy and gladness”—yet we may not see in all this a message of his good-will to man. He gives us parents, to bring us to the Father in heaven ; and brothers, to bring us to the true Brother ; and friends, to bring us to the true Friend ;—but we may never see Him in these our loving relations, nor hear *his* voice. He sends us mercies, that we might be led by them to the spring from which these flow, and which itself is a fountain of living and ever-flowing water. He sends us chastisements to make us pause and think, and hear his voice ; but yet we may “despise” or “faint under” our sorrow, and never meet our Father who is sending it, and seeking to win us by it. He permits us to feel the emptiness, the poverty, the want of rest

and peace in self and sin, that we may be brought to Him, the only rest of the weary and heavy-laden, but we refuse to go. He gives us conscience,—which is verily neither of the devil, the world, nor the flesh,—to rebuke us, terrify us, drive us from evil, and also to smile on us and bless us when we hear his voice in it for good ; but we may refuse to obey his voice in it. Above all, and as interpreting and explaining all, He has given to us his holy word, with all the revelation it contains of what holy men have known of God ; with all Christ's own divine and glorious life of love ; with his words of truth and works of mercy. He has there recorded the history of Christ's atoning death for sinners ; and “greater love can no man show than this man, that He should give his life for his friends :” “in this was manifested the love of God, that He gave his Son to be a propitiation for sins.” Add to all this, the striving of his Holy Spirit with us and in us ; the words of truth and love spoken to us from the lips of the living and the dead ; the Lord's Days, in which even in their very silence we are invited to come to the risen Saviour for rest ; the preaching of the gospel and the grace of God to every person ;

the holy sacraments, in which Christ and the blessings of the gospel are pictured to us in fitting symbols, and given to us freely as the water sprinkled on our infant brow, or the bread and wine that nourish our mortal bodies. Oh ! it is utterly impossible to enumerate the various ways in which, "with all his heart, all his soul, and all his strength," Jesus Christ seeks to save lost sinners whom He loves even as He loves Himself ! Surely the one fact, that He has Himself come "to seek and save the lost," includes in it every other proof of love and of "good-will to man !"

Let no one therefore excuse his sin and loss, as if he were doomed. Every sinner is doomed—but no man is doomed to be a sinner. It is not men who are knocking at Christ's door, bolted and barred against them by some unknown, mysterious, and inexplicable decree ; but it is men shutting their door against Christ, bolting and barring it by the decree of their own self-will, itself the mystery of iniquity. "Behold I stand at the door and knock : if any man will open unto me, I will come in and sup with him and he with me."

Thirdly, another truth regarding the love of Christ is revealed in these parables, and that is,

His joy when a lost sinner is saved. The shepherd rejoiced when the lost sheep was found; the woman called her neighbours to rejoice with her when the lost piece of money was recovered; and the father rejoiced when the prodigal returned, saying, "Let us eat and be merry: for this my son was dead and is alive again, he was lost and is found." Even thus, says Christ, there is joy among the angels in heaven over one sinner who repenteth. But if there is joy among the angels, much more is there joy in the heart of Christ; for He is "better than the angels." Their joy is in sympathy with his. Men also are more precious to Him than they can be to the angels; for men are bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh. Angels are but the ministers to his brethren, who are the heirs of salvation.

"There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth!" The conversion of a sinner might possibly give little joy to his nearest friends on earth; while to some, alas! it might give positive annoyance and excite feelings only of dislike or contempt. In no case would it be of any general interest beyond the small circle of a few true Christians. To any one

of them, however,—to the Christian parent, for example, of the sinner thus restored to himself and to his God,—no event in life could happen which would be a source of deeper gratitude and joy. But when we turn from this ignorant, selfish world, with its false views of what is man's true greatness and gain, to heaven and its inhabitants, we learn from Christ that "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over *one* sinner that repenteth!" Only think of it! Think of the value of repentance in the estimation of the mighty angels, so great in head, in heart, and in possession of an experience gathered from human history, and from all they have seen, known, and acquired, during long ages, from the vast kingdom of God. What undying love must they possess when the salvation of one of the worst sinners on earth wakens up their joy to new bursts of heavenly song—even as the breaking forth of a beam of light from the margin of a midnight cloud fills the woods of the warm South with the songs of nightingales; or as the first rays of the morning sun call forth the larks from every meadow in our Northern land to their early hymns of praise. And it may be that the repentance of any sinner (however common, by

the grace of God) is yet a constant wonder to angels, who know his former ignorance, pride, lusts, or mysterious indifference to the things of God, and the long time in which he refused to repent, and the gracious divine influences which he so wilfully resisted. Does not the deliverance of a sailor from the sea excite gratitude among the members of his family; but should there arrive, from the snows and icebergs of the frozen North, one old sailor who had accompanied Franklin on his last voyage, would not the news spread over the whole world; men crowd around him to gaze on his weatherbeaten countenance; thousands grasp his hand and bid him welcome; and would there not be more joy than over ninety and nine seamen who had escaped the perils of the deep? Joy would spread everywhere, like an aurora, for this son who was dead and is alive, who was lost and is found!

Let all of us give joy to Christ, and to the angels, by holding fast our confidence in Jesus.

“He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth in him.”

“And we have seen and do testify that the

Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world. Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him and he in God. And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him. Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as He is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love. We love Him, because He first loved us."

THE STORY OF THE PRODIGAL SON.

PART I.

"A certain man had two sons: and the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided to them his living," &c. &c.—ST. LUKE XV. 11-32.

I HAVE already addressed you on the first portion of the fifteenth chapter of the Gospel of St. Luke, and explained the peculiar circumstances which led our Lord to utter those parables contained in the chapter, of which that of the Prodigal Son is the last.

I shall now give you an exposition of this most touching and glorious portion of our Lord's teaching.

LOST CONFIDENCE.

"A certain man had two sons: and the younger

of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me."

This young man lost confidence in his father. He did not believe that he could be so happy in the fulness of his father's house, and in the enjoyment of his portion of goods there, as he would when spending it, according to his own likings. in a far country.

This is a picture of a sinner's falling away from God through unbelief. He loses confidence in God as his *Father*. He ceases to trust in his goodwill towards him, or to believe in the reality of his wish to make him good and happy, and to give him, according to the riches of his grace, through Jesus, the best things in the best way, at the best time. He thus departs from God, first of all in heart, and desires to enjoy the portion of his goods without a sense of his presence, a wish for his blessing, or a thought for his glory. His secret prayer is,—not expressed indeed in words, and not consciously, perhaps, in thought, but nevertheless really in acts,—“Lord, give me my portion of goods, and let me use that portion as *I* will. Give me my body, and let me gratify its appetites ; give me my mind, and let me employ its powers ; give me

my heart, and let me pour forth its affections ; give me my time and talents ;—and let me employ all according to my own wishes, and as I think best for my own pleasure.” This is lost confidence.

“Take heed, brethren,” says the Apostle, “*lest* there be in you the evil heart of *unbelief*, in departing from the living God.” For this unbelief is indeed “*the* evil heart ;” it is essentially evil, and the source of all sins, the root of all misery. What is the real source of discontent, in which the bitter cry is heard :—“What shall I eat and drink, and wherewithal shall I be clothed ?”—Lost confidence in God our Father, who knoweth that we have need of all these things ! Why is it that we fall into grievous error, which tends to ruin the soul ? Because of lost confidence in our Father’s wisdom to teach us, and a consequent leaning as “fools,” on our own understanding. Whence arises hopeless despair ?—From lost confidence in our Father’s love and mercy to give us all good ! Confidence in God is the soul’s life : want of confidence the soul’s death. The one is union with God ; the other, separation. The one is heaven ; the other, hell !

THE GOODS DIVIDED.

“And he divided unto them his living.”

It is sufficient for my present purpose, to notice merely the fact, that the younger son got all he asked. He asked the portion of his goods, and his father granted his request. Strange! you are disposed perhaps to exclaim. Yet does not God thus act towards the sinner? Ah! it is a very solemn fact that he does so. If the sinner rebelliously insists upon it, God may permit him to eat of his own way, and be filled with his own devices. The body of the prodigal is not slain, nor his mind destroyed, nor his affections rooted out, nor his time ended, nor his talents taken away, on the day when he presumptuously seeks to enjoy all, without God. Unless he “chooses the fear of the Lord,” he cannot be forced by any outward compulsion to do so. Jesus did not force the young man who came to Him for eternal life, to sell all he had, and to take up his cross and follow Him. Nor did He compel Judas to resign his thirty pieces of silver, but said to him, “What thou doest, do quickly.” Let us take heed! If, despising his counsels, neglecting his warnings, and treating

lightly his messages, and losing confidence in his fatherly love, we insist upon getting the portion of our goods, to dispose of them according to the inclinations of our own selfish, deceitful, and desperately wicked heart,—then may God, in righteous judgment, permit us to have our own way, and give us the portion which we desire to possess without himself! But “the backslider in heart will be filled with his own ways.” So was it with this Prodigal Son.

THE DEPARTURE.

“Not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and *took his journey into a far country.*”

This departure from his father was the necessary and immediate result of lost confidence. It is so with every man who loses his trust in God. “The evil heart of unbelief” is soon evidenced by his openly “departing from the living God.” But how, it may be asked, can we depart from God? “Whither shall we go from his Spirit, or flee from his presence?” It is true that we cannot *so* depart from God our Father, as to be concealed from his sight; for “his eyes are upon the ways of man, and He seeth all his goings.”

“There is no darkness nor shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves.” Could the sinner, terrified by the consciousness of the Divine presence, fly with the rapidity of light to the uttermost parts of the sea, there he would meet the same God. That all-seeing Eye ever searches us : that omnipotent Hand is ever “laid upon us ;” “He besets us before and behind.” In one sense, then, we can never depart from God. But we may yet do so in another. We may depart from Him *in spirit*, by forgetting Him, forsaking his ways, and ceasing to have any holy and loving communion with Him. Though we cannot blot the sun out of the blue vault of heaven, we may nevertheless shut our eyes, and seal them against his light and beauty ; and, as far as *we* are concerned, this would be the same as if the sun ceased to illuminate our path, or to be the light of the world. And thus, too, may we depart from a friend, by shutting him out of our hearts. What though he may dwell with us in the same home, what though we may hear his voice, or come into contact with his person, yet if we have no communion whatever with Him in spirit, how wide is the distance which separates us ! And thus the

sinner departs from his Father. He shuts his heart against his light and love. He ceases to cultivate acquaintance with Him, by meditating upon his word and ways, by walking with Him in loving obedience, or by enjoying communion with Him in prayer. "God is not in all his thoughts." "He forgets God," and lives practically "*without God* in the world." It is true, God ever sees him, and daily provides for him, causing "the outgoings of the morning and evening to rejoice over him," and speaks to him by his works of creation and providence, by conscience, by his Word, by friends and ministers, by mercies and afflictions, and "spares him as a man spares his son;" but the sinner is blind and sees Him not, deaf and hears Him not, hard-hearted and loves Him not! He has taken his journey to a far country.

The prodigal did not *immediately* depart. He waited for some days, though "not *many* days." Neither does the man who loses faith in God manifest at once, by any outward acts, his lost confidence. For some time he may keep up the outward *forms* of love. He may come before God as his people come,—but his *heart* is far from Him! He may engage in those outward duties

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which are the natural expressions of a loving and obedient soul,—but the living spirit is wanting! God's service is a drudgery, for it is not the service of sonship. He may have a religion of many works, but he has not any work of true religion. God hath departed from him; for he hath departed from God!

LIFE IN THE FAR COUNTRY.

“He took his journey into a far country, and there *wasted his substance with riotous living.*”

Self cannot suffice for self. We must have something without us to support the spirit within us. Therefore he who gives up serving God as a son, immediately serves Satan as a slave. “Two evils” are necessarily committed by the sinner who gives up God: the one is, that of forsaking the “fountain of living waters;” which is soon followed by the other, that of “hewing out cisterns, *broken cisterns* that can hold no water.” It was so with the prodigal. He separated from his father, and then “wasted his substance in riotous living.” It is so with sinners. All waste their substance, though it may be in different ways. They waste their *bodies* by riotous living; by mad intoxication, or by

sensuality, in its degraded or more refined forms;—they waste their *money*, by appropriating all to the service of mere self, to gratify their vanity, ambition, or luxury;—they waste their *time*, by idleness, or by the pursuit of everything save “the one thing needful;”—they waste their *influence* over others, and in society, by using it in the cause of evil, and seldom, if ever, in spite of opportunities innumerable, in the cause of good for its own sake;—they waste their *affections*, by bestowing them on unworthy objects;—and they waste their *mental powers*, by neglecting their cultivation, or by devoting them solely to paltry and perishable ends. Their whole life is an extravagant waste of every talent,—a perversion of every gift,—the destruction by wild riot or slow decay of the immense substance which the Master has given his servants to occupy till He comes. Verily, “treasures of wickedness *profit* nothing!” “For what profit is it if a man gain the whole world and lose his own soul?” And it is this death which many men call “life!”

But every prodigal who thus seeks life in a far country finds emptiness of heart and spirit, and no peace! It was so with him whose history we are considering.

THE FAMINE.

“And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land, and he began to be in want.”

He did not, at once, spend all his substance. It lasted some time. He was in a land of famine, indeed, but that famine did not touch him for a season. It reached him, however, at last, and he “*began to be in want!*” Nor does the sinner who departs from God, at first experience the famine which essentially belongs to the “far country” to which he has wandered. He has substance sufficient to banish for a time, however short, the cravings of his higher nature. The fascinations of society congenial to his mere earthly mind; the love of the creature filling up his mere earthly affections; the indulgence of more refined tastes; the excitement connected with dissipation,—in all this wasting of his substance there is a partial filling up of his wants, and there seems even to be an abundant supply for him until the end of life.

But a change, sooner or later, must come, when even he suffers from the “mighty famine,” which has desolated that far country since the beginning

of the world, and reduced every dweller in it to beggary. When the prodigal sees all the water of his pleasure run out, and the broken cistern alone remaining, then he is compelled to feel that "it is an evil and a *bitter* thing to forsake the Lord his God !"

He began to be in want ! And what is this great *want* of the sinner ? What, let me ask, is the want of the eye which is closed against the light ? Put gold upon the eye, does *that* supply its want ? Give food to it, or cover it with purple and fine linen, do these things supply its want ? No ! But give it the light again, and that will do it, or nothing will. And just as the eye is made for light, so is the soul made for God ! Give to the soul all created things, and pour at man's feet the treasures of earth, and adorn his body with the finest apparel, and give him sumptuous fare every day, and permit music and art to do their utmost to please him,—is his *want* therefore supplied ? The experiment has been tried for six thousand years, and it has utterly failed ; and must fail, *because there is a God !* When not loving Him, there is a yearning in man's nature, which nothing else can satisfy—a gnawing hunger for some food

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not yet obtained—a deep thirst for some fountain never yet drunk from. And all creation cannot fill up this want of an immortal spirit, which even in its very misery thus unconsciously seeks after the infinite God !

I do not say that every man *knows* this secret of his sorrow or of his joy. The babe who cries out in its uneasiness, does not know, and cannot tell, *why* it suffers, and those who minister to it are often as ignorant. Neither may the unhappy sinner know *what* he wants, and his friends may not be any wiser. But this much, at least, he knows, that as a man he wants *something* which he has never yet possessed. His very wretchedness and agony of mind witness to this. They are the signals of distress from one who has made shipwreck of his faith ! It is also true—too true—that the sinner may disbelieve when he is told that God is the only supply of his want ; and he may also refuse to return to God, or open his heart to Him ; but it is nevertheless equally true, that until his heart finds God, it will search in vain, though it search for ever, for any other food to satisfy its hunger, or for any other water to assuage its thirst ! “ There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.” But

“Thou wilt keep him in *perfect peace* whose soul is stayed on thee, because he trusteth in thee!”

HELP IN FAMINE.

“He went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine.”

To feed swine was a most degrading employment for a Jew. The citizen of the far country thus helped the prodigal only by degrading him.

The sinner's progress in sin and misery is here vividly described. This fellowship with the citizen of the far country represents that period in his history when, becoming more hardened in evil, he becomes the “companion of fools,” and seeks the friendship of those who will quiet the risings of conscience by ridiculing the fears which it creates and by applauding the vice which it condemns; who will help to drown every care in draughts of maddening liquor, or silence the secret anguish of the heart by the song and excitement of midnight revelry. If the “fellow-citizens of the saints” are, under God, our best helpers to keep us within the holy precincts of our Father's home, so are the citizens of the far country the most common and

influential means, in the hands of Satan, for ruining and degrading all prodigals who associate with them. How many brokenhearted wanderers have in their hour of bitterness or of penitence, remembered "bad companions" as the chief instruments of their crimes! The cell, the hulk, the penal colony, the scaffold, have echoed the same confession. How many, too, who began their Christian course apparently under every prospect of advancing from strength to strength, and from glory to glory, have been gradually alienated from God, by the subtle influence of a friendship which, without being characterised by riotous living, was at least worldly and godless. Many a wife, many a husband, by such unholy alliances, have been kept for ever in a far country, never, never to meet in their heavenly Father's home! "Be not unequally yoked with unbelievers." "The companion of fools shall be destroyed." For what can those citizens do, who are "strangers and foreigners from the commonwealth of Israel," to relieve the wants of this poor prodigal? His want they do not understand, and so they cannot help to supply it. Alas! they only degrade him, and sink him deeper and deeper. They have no home for his

heart ; but send him to the naked plains. They have no employment to engage his great powers ; and they give him, accordingly, the lowest work of the lowest slave. It would not have been so in his Father's home ! In his service, and in his alone, is "perfect freedom," dignity, and joy ! Oh ! poor prodigal, hast *thou* not found it so ? What have thine ungodly friends done for thee ? what have they given thee ? what peace afforded thee ? what enduring good bestowed on thee ? what sacrifices made for thee ? Would thy God and Saviour, whom thou hast forsaken,—would thy Christian friends, whom thou hast despised, have so treated thee ? Thou hast tried the one in vain ; I beseech thee to try the other, and thou shalt not be put to shame !

HUSKS.

"He would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat."

But he could not. Husks are food for beasts, but not for men. And such is the character of every kind of food which the sinner, who rejects God's will as his "meat and drink," would "fill" himself with. Mere husks ! Wealth, honours,

fame, science, art, society, business, self-indulgence, creature-love,—all, all are husks when not received from God, with his blessing, and enjoyed according to his will. Of themselves, they are utterly unfit to support the soul. The sinner would fain fill himself with these, but he cannot. Having “perverted his way,” he may “fret against the Lord,” who righteously permits him to eat the fruit of his way ; and this does not cure, but increases his misery, and makes it the more devilish. Well might the poet exclaim, who all his life had so lived and suffered,—

“We wither from our youth—we pine away ;
Sick, sick unfound the boon, unslaked the thirst !”

The sinner speaks of the pain and difficulty of serving God, and pictures, in colours startling to flesh and blood, the agony and self-denial of dying daily, and of carrying the cross. But does he not speak of what he has never experienced ? The whole Church of the living God in every age, who have tried this life, declare, with one voice, that it is liberty, peace, and joy unspeakable ! But *all* men have partaken of the sinner’s food, and experienced, in some degree, life without God, and they know it to be abject slavery,—bitter misery ; and

that Satan and self are the worst and most cruel masters men can serve! What a slavery is self-will!—what a gnawing at the heart are unsatisfied desires!—what wretchedness in the appetite for sinful gratifications growing stronger and stronger, while the pleasure which is ever hoped for from them is growing fainter, the sense of the horrible nature of the bondage is ever recurring, and the power of throwing off that bondage is ever diminishing! Oh! what sights must be seen—what agonies endured—what battles fought by the man who forsakes God! In vain—in vain he would seek to fill himself with the husks of sin,—he *cannot*! His heart being empty of God as his portion, all creation, we repeat it, must to him be husks! And yet is it not merciful in God, as well as just, to permit misery to abound to the sinner, so long as he loves sin? Is not this a testimony at once of God's hatred to the sin, and his desire that the suffering it brings should, if possible, lash the criminal away from it, to him who has mercy to pardon and grace to help.

SELFISHNESS.

“No man gave unto him.”

The husks had failed—the citizens could give

no more. The watchword of the far country is, "Every man for himself;" while the household word of the Father's home is, "Love thy neighbour as thyself." "No man gave unto him!" What a picture of the selfishness of the sinner!—for sin is essentially selfish. Self always takes, and is ever getting poorer; love is ever giving, and is ever getting richer. Self thinks it more profitable to receive than to give; love knows it is "more blessed to give than to receive." Self may bestow much; but love alone can bestow itself. Where this divine grace of love is wanting, how small is the sympathy between man and man! How small is the sympathy of the mere worldly man for the old companion of his guilty pleasures, when he is overtaken by misfortune, and can no longer contribute his share to add to the enjoyment of his fellows; and how small are the sacrifices which he is disposed to make, with no hope of remuneration save the gratitude of a broken heart! Who of his associates in guilt tends him in his sickness; mourns with him in his sorrows; pours oil into his wounds; drops a tear, even of affection, on his grave; or cherishes his memory when he is gone? And no wonder; for the sinner was as selfish as

themselves, and gets but what he gave. Oh ! how loving seem those “riotous livers” as the glass goes round, and as they pledge each other to lasting friendship ! They call each other friends and brothers ;—but, alas ! the thread which binds them is a mere gossamer, which a breath may sever. Let the working man who spends his wages among such “friends” be ruined in body and soul, and when he is gone, the dead dog is hardly less missed, or less cared for than he. Will they sing a song less at their next jovial meeting because he is away ? or take a single thought whether he is miserable or happy, ruined or saved for ever ? Does he ask their sincere love—their hearty sympathy—their brotherly aid—their purse to relieve his famished family, or their prayers to relieve his famished soul ? He asks in vain ! They have got out of him all he can give them, and now “no man will give to him !” Be assured, that sin, whatever mask she may wear, is selfishness in disguise—and that the only hearts we can *depend* upon through the trials and struggles of our earthly life, are those who are really possessed by the spirit of Him who died for sinners,—a love this which “suffereth long and is kind ;” “seeketh not her own ;”

“beareth all things ;” “endureth all things ;” a love “which never fails,” and which adds to its own inexhaustible riches while pouring them into the empty hearts of others !

THE AWAKING.

“When he came to himself.”

The prodigal had sunk to the lowest state of degradation and misery. He had been like one out of his mind—mad ! And who so mad as a sinner set upon the indulgence of his evil desires ? Consider only, in the light of eternal truth, the history of any man who spends his life in seeking to obtain peace for his immortal spirit in what is seen and temporal ; and it is a moral madness of the most terrible kind. It is a pursuit of shadows—a grasping at bubbles—a building upon quicksands—a believing in mere dreams. Is it not madness to seek peace where misery alone has ever been found ?—to act against the dictates of reason, and the convictions of conscience, and the findings of experience ? To know that there is a hell, and yet to rush into it,—that there is a heaven, and yet to fly from it,—that there is to be a day of judgment, and yet to treasure up guilt for

it,—that there is a Saviour, and yet to despise Him,—that there is a God who loves us, yet to cherish a carnal heart at enmity to Him,—that there is a Saviour, yet to refuse Him,—a Holy Spirit, yet to reject Him ! And all for what?—For self, for riotous living, or for feeding on husks with swine ! This is the incredible madness of sinners.

But we may view the coming of the prodigal to himself, as a finding of himself the moment he resolves to find his Father. He had gone to a far country to find “*self*” in everything ; but he lost himself in the pursuit of his own shadow. And this is true of every man who imagines that the best way to love self, is not to love God. In thus seeking to gain his “*life*” he loses it. He does not get what he desires, and he does not desire what he gets. Mere self is the blindest guide to self, the greatest cheat, the poorest provider, the most cruel tyrant ! Selfishness is self-destruction,—its wisdom, folly ; its independence, slavery ; its sources of happiness, dried up cisterns ; and its promises, vain delusions. We never find ourselves, or possess ourselves, or enjoy ourselves, until we cease to seek ourselves, and with a single eye seek God. In all things we shall find our good,

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when in all things we find our God ; and we shall succeed in doing what is pleasing to ourselves, only when we begin by, and steadily aim at, doing what is pleasing to our Father.

THE QUESTION OF HOPE.

“ How many hired servants in my father’s house have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger !”

There can be no repentance without some hope—some apprehension of mercy. Sorrow for sin is inseparable from seeing the love of God to us as sinners. Oh ! there was life to the spirit of the prodigal in that word “ Father !” He had still a father, who had not changed—who had still abundance to give, and a loving heart to give it. The light of love again rests upon the old forsaken home ! He no longer thinks of it as a place from which he desires to depart ; but to which he would gladly return. The confidence which, for a time, was lost, again begins to dawn upon his disconsolate heart, and to give it some drops of comfort. He asked himself, Why he, who, in spite of all his wanderings, was still a son, should not partake of some of the bounty which his father liberally

bestowed upon his hired servants? Every objection and difficulty vanished before the glad thought that he had a *Father*. It was enough! A father's heart contained a pledge for every needful blessing.

And thus it is with the lost sinner when he comes to himself. He asks, "Why should I be a miserable lost sinner, when I, too, have a Father able and willing to save?—Why should I be weary and heavy laden, burdened by my guilt, when my Father is willing to pardon me as well as others?—Why should I be wretched and unhappy, when my Father is able to give me peace?—Why should I be overcome by sin, when my Father is able to give me strength to overcome it?—Why should thousands be streaming into my Father's house, and I shut out of it?—Is there not 'bread enough and to spare?'" There is, for God is still our Father. When we were baptized in childhood, and long ere we could know the love of God, any more than our mother's love, the one was as real, and infinitely more deep and enduring than the other. The waters of baptism signified and sealed the love of Father, Son, and Spirit to us individually. Every day since then, and in everything

until now, He has been to us a Father. We may have lost faith in this love, and lost confidence in Him, and gone to a far country, where we have found no home for our weary hearts ; but, oh ! let us be persuaded that we have a Father still ! *He* hath not yet changed ; and while He hates our sins, He hates not us ; but cries in love, “ Return to the Lord *thy* God, for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity ! ”

“ How many hired servants in my father’s house have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger ! ” I can conceive a thought similar to this, suggested to the sinner by the peace and happiness which he cannot fail to behold even in God’s beautiful house of Nature. There is surely a contrast presented, which must touch his heart, between the evident satisfaction of all the creatures of God, and his own emptiness. “ Why,” he may ask, “ do those birds sing so cheerfully, while I, so much ‘ better than the fowls,’ am so sad and sorrowful ? — Why is there such contentedness in the countenances of those dumb cattle which ruminate in the valleys—such joyousness in those lambs which sport on the uplands—while I am bowed down with saddened brow and weary heart ? The lion

of the desert seeks his prey from God. The raven cries for his food. He opens his hand, and liberally supplies the wants of every living thing ! There is abundance of what is necessary for the life of the countless millions of animals which inhabit the earth, the air, and the waters ; and shall an immortal being like myself, created after God's own image, for whom the Saviour died ;— shall I be permitted to perish from want of that food which my higher life requires ? It cannot be ! ‘ There is enough in my Father's house, and to spare, why should I perish with hunger ? ’ Moreover, has not my Father preserved my life, even when I was his enemy, and shall He show no mercy when I desire to be his friend ? Has He bestowed so many good things on my body, giving light to guide me, raiment to clothe me, food to support me, sleep to refresh me, the beautiful in nature and art to delight me, science to enrich me, friends to cheer me, and opened up a thousand other sources of enjoyment for me, and all while I lived in a far country without Him ; and shall He now shut up his bowels of compassion from me, when I seek nothing more save his friendship and love ? Can He forget to be gracious ? Are his

mercies exhausted and clean gone for ever? It cannot be! 'There is bread enough, and to spare, why should I perish for hunger?'" Fear not, O Prodigal! "Blessed are they *who hunger and thirst* after righteousness, for they shall be filled!"

THE STORY OF THE PRODIGAL SON.

PART II.

*"A certain man had two sons: And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided to them his living," &c. &c.—ST. LUKE
xv. 11-32.*

THE RESOLUTION.

"**I** WILL arise and go to my father."

This is life from the dead ! It is the dawn of eternal day ; the seed-time of a harvest whose fruit endureth unto life everlasting. It is indeed a memorable hour in the life of the wanderer, when he resolves to return to his father. But how does the sinner return to God ? Remember the nature of his departure. It was not a physical, but a moral journey ; and consisted not in a change of

place, but in a change of heart. It was losing confidence in God,—a shutting of the heart to his love, like a shutting of the eye to light. To return to God, is but reversing this process. It is the restoration of confidence—the opening of the heart to the unchangeable love of God,—in one word, it is the seeing of God revealed as our *Father* in Jesus Christ his Son. For if God be indeed recognised as our reconciled Father, this necessarily implies faith in his character as such, and in his fatherly love towards us and interest in us,—an assured confidence in his good-will,—a seeing of Him as worthy of our profoundest reverence, deepest love, and unreserved devotedness. When we thus see and know God, we have not to travel far to find Him. He *is* found even as the light is found when the eye is opened to its beams. He is not far from any one of us.

THE INTENDED PRAYER.

“I will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son ; make me as one of thy hired servants.”

Such was the confession and prayer which the

prodigal intended to make to his father when they met. He had no hope of being received as a son, but would thankfully become a servant—anything, if he could only obtain admission once more into his father's house. As yet, his views were very dark regarding the fulness and freeness of his father's grace. The life in the far country had weakened his power of perceiving the beauty of such a heart. He made up his mind, therefore, to be treated, for a time at least, as a slave; as if he had said, "It cannot be that my father can treat me at present as a son; but I shall willingly serve him; and then, when I have proved, by my obedience and diligence, that I am no longer the prodigal I once was, but an obedient and loving son, then, perhaps, my father may treat me as a son. In the mean time, I dare not look for any proofs of affection upon his part. But come what may I shall arise!" And it is often thus with the returning sinner:—"It cannot be," he argues, "that God will at once receive me and treat me as a son; I, who have despised his counsel, and would none of his reproof; I, who have so obstinately sinned against light and conviction; it cannot be that the holy and just God will receive such an one imme-

diately into his favour. But I will begin again to resume my long-silenced prayers, to read my long-closed Bible, and to listen attentively to the long-neglected preaching of the Word ; I will begin some work in the Christian Church, and, when I have proved to God and my own conscience, that I am a reformed man, and no longer the weak, irresolute, hypocritical professor which I have hitherto been, then, I hope, my Father will receive me. In the mean time, one thing I am resolved to do, I will arise and go to Him ! This week, this day, even now, I shall pour out the sorrows of my weary heart before my Father, and implore mercy to pardon, and grace to help ; and I will say unto Him, ‘ Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before Thee, and am no more worthy to be called Thy son ; make me as one of Thy hired servants ! ’ ”

If the result in the case of the prodigal proved how low an estimate he had formed of his father’s feelings towards his penitent and returning child, so will the result, in the case of every penitent sinner who thus argues, also prove how low an estimate he had formed of God’s love, when resolving to return in sincerity of soul to seek his favour.

THE RETURN.

“And he arose and came to his father.”

However long the journey was, the prodigal did not rest until he came to his father. Outward obstacles there may have been in such a return from a far country. There may have been deep valleys to thread; steep mountains to climb; hunger, and thirst, and weariness to endure; old companionships to forsake; and many scenes on the road to tempt the wanderer to pause; but these did not deter him. Even so, there are difficulties corresponding to those in the journey Godward of the returning sinner. But whatever his difficulties may be, whatever temptations may assail, or doubts and fears perplex him, he must firmly resolve, in spite of all, to stop at nothing short of God himself. There must be no rest until he finds his Father. Any spot where He is not found, is, to him, the far country still. For it is possible that he may be tempted to return to the form of prayer, yet not to God who is the Hearer of prayer—to the Bible, yet not to God who speaks in the Bible—to the Lord's Supper, yet not to God who can alone feed his soul with the Bread of Life—to ministers, the earthen vessels, yet not to God who is “the

treasure of the soul," which earthen vessels should keep and dispense to sinners ;—and all such halts, we repeat, may prove to be as destructive as a residence in the far country of riotous living. David prayed, "O send out Thy light and Thy truth : let them lead me, let them bring me unto Thy holy hill, and to Thy tabernacles. Then will I go unto the altar of God, unto God my exceeding joy !" He did not despise, but honour the means of God's appointment. He would go therefore, guided by light and truth, to God's hill—to his tabernacles,—yea, nearer still, to his very altar ; but he would not stop at any of them, but go *by* them, yet not resting at them or in them, until he came to his Father, to "God his exceeding joy !"

THE WELCOME.

"But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck, and kissed him."

We fear to touch this exquisite picture of parental love by any words of ours ! We would desire rather that the heart should dwell upon it in silent meditation, and receive into its depths the image which it presents of tenderness and compassion.

How different was the conduct of the father from what the son anticipated ! He did not retire to his house, nor refuse to see his child ; leaving him to find the place which he sought among the hired servants. He did not wait even for his arrival, but met him. Nor did he meet him near his door, or advance with tardy steps to receive him : the eye of love, which had long looked for this return, was quick to see, while yet too far away for any other eye but a father's to discover, in the barefooted, ragged wanderer, the child who had departed rich in his possessions. The heart of love brooked no delay. The father "had compassion,"—and so he ran and halted not until his arms of welcome and mercy embraced, and his kisses of forgiveness and affection reassured, the weary and forlorn one. Beautiful picture indeed of the human heart of a father rejoicing over a penitent son ; but, oh ! how much more beautiful as a picture, drawn by God's own Son, of his and our Father in heaven receiving a returning sinner !

If we, being evil, know how to give good things to our children, how much more will our Father in heaven give good things to those who ask Him.

As the father met the prodigal "*afar off*," so God meets the sinner "*afar off*."—Long before there is a realising sense of the Father's love, that love is drawing the sinner to itself. When the resolution to return is but forming, the Father is strengthening it into act. Though the flax is only smoking, He does not quench it, but fans it to a flame; though the pipe is bruised, and gives forth as yet no note of praise, the Father breaks it not; though faith can as yet be hardly separated from unbelieving fear, nor hope be distinguished from despondency, nor penitence from remorse, nor love from trembling anxiety,—yet the Lord meets the sinner when very far off from the measure of good, and strength, and comfort, which will yet be experienced if he "*follows on*" to know his Father. The all-important question is, whether there is *any* life—any fixed determination to arise and to meet God the Father, and be reconciled to Him, and be his for ever; for where any true life exists, it contains a pledge in itself, from its very nature, of that life being perfected. The sigh which comes from the broken and contrite heart, the feeble prayer which is breathed from the depths of the spirit longing for peace with God, and which is expressed as yet only

in groanings that cannot be uttered,—these signs of life, which may not be consciously discerned by the prodigal himself while afar off, are discovered, nevertheless, by God, who searches the spirit; and, weak though they be, they cannot be crushed by all the power of Satan, for they are strengthened, even as they have been produced, by the almighty grace of God.

THE CONFESSION.

“And the son said unto him, Father I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.”

Such was the confession of the contrite prodigal. He acknowledged his conduct to have been a crime committed against his heavenly, as well as in the sight of his earthly, father. Sin, thus viewed in relation to God, is inseparable from true repentance. An unrenewed man may confess and lament his conduct, because it has injured his worldly interests, exposed him to the bitter remarks of society, alienated from him the affections of a friend, or brought those whom he loved into trouble. His sorrow may be acute and agonising, yea, “working death;” yet it may all the while be

essentially selfish, and only "the sorrow of the world." God is not in all his thoughts. It is otherwise with that "godly sorrow" which accompanies true repentance. God is recognised by the conscience as a real person, who abhors iniquity, and his judgment is acknowledged to be according to righteousness. Grief, at having sinned against the creature, is absorbed in the deeper grief at having offended the holy Creator. The cry of the contrite spirit is like David's, "Against Thee, and Thee only, have I sinned." Such was the penitent confession of the prodigal, "I have sinned against heaven, and before thee."

He confessed also, that he was "no more worthy to be called his son." This was true. While it was humbling, it must have been comforting to have given utterance to his sense of past ingratitude. And it is thus with the true penitent. He cannot help confessing his utter unworthiness, because he feels it deeply. It is relief to his heart to be able to say, "Behold, O Lord, I am vile!" He feels that in himself there is no worth which would save him, and that his only hope is, out of himself, in the love of his Father, which, because it is love, deems him worthy of being saved. Let this encourage

desponding sinners. You are afraid that God will not receive you, because you are unworthy. Yet you hope to be received some time or other. You have not made up your mind to be lost. And when do you expect to be received as *worthy*? How do you mean to obtain such merit as will entitle you to claim sonship as a right, and no longer as a favour? During the time you remain away from God, are you getting better; or are you not necessarily every hour getting worse? for where can good be found, except from your Father! Beware of such delusions. They are the offspring of ignorance or pride, or of both. As a sinner and outcast prodigal alone, you must be saved; because you *are* this, and can be nothing else, until you return to God through faith in Christ crucified for the chief of sinners.

But while the intended confession is made by the prodigal, we hear nothing of his intended prayer. When resolving to return to his father, he resolved also to say, "Make me as one of thy hired servants." But, now that he has returned, we hear him make no such request. Nor need we be surprised at this. Strange had it

been otherwise; for how could such a petition, at such a time, have escaped his lips? How could he have asked to be treated as a slave, when he was already treated as a son? Was it possible for him, at the very moment when he felt the beatings of that father's loving heart mingling with those of his own penitent heart, to refuse the blessings of sonship which love was granting, and to request the slavery which enmity alone could bestow? To do so, would be to reject the love for which he yearned, whose reality he had not hitherto, either in prosperity or adversity, conceived of,—the enjoyment of which he had not dared to hope for until years of servitude had expired; but which was now poured down in floods upon his parched and thirsty spirit.

So must it be with every sinner who returns to his Father. It is possible that he may not hope to experience the love of God for years. In his ignorance of the richness of His grace, he may make up his mind to wait long before he finds mercy to pardon, or grace to help; but if he will only return,—if he will only arise and go to his Father, and pour out his heart in prayer,

confessing his sins committed in His sight, acknowledging heartily his unworthiness to be called a son,—then will he, too, find, in answer to believing prayer, such a sense of the mercy of God in pardoning transgression, and the grace of God in giving peace to the conscience through the blood of Atonement, and of the power of God to lift up the fallen, to strengthen faith, kindle love, and restore the whole soul,—that the thought of being treated as a slave will be forgotten in the peaceful assurance that he is already treated as a son. And will this experience of the mercy and love of God tend to efface the impression of sin from the sinner's heart? Impossible! The more the love of God is experienced, the more is the vileness of sin in ourselves perceived. It is love which breaks the heart, and opens up the fountain of tears for sin. When would the prodigal, think you, feel most bitterly his sin, and be most sensible of his unworthiness? Not when first departing from his father's house—nor when wasting his substance in riotous living—nor even when he resolved to arise and go to his father;—but when he met that father, and most intensely realised the greatness of his love,—when he felt

his arms around him, and his kisses impress his cheek,—then, if ever, would the remembrance of his ingratitude and of his crime crush his heart and agonise his spirit! It was when God had promised to bestow the richest blessings upon his rebellious people, that He predicts their penitence as a necessary consequence of their belief in his love. (Ezekiel xxxvi. 24—31.) “*Then,*” when He had cleansed them, and given them a new heart, and blessed them, “shall ye remember your own evil ways, and your doings that were not good, and shall loathe yourselves in your own sight, for your iniquities, and for your abominations.”

Nor will repentance cease to be characteristic of the restored son, though it began in the returning prodigal. In the light of God’s excellency, we perceive our own deformity. While we rejoice in the thought, “Behold what manner of love is this that we should be called the sons of God!” we cannot but indulge, at the same time, in the humble confession, “We are not worthy to be called Thy sons!”

THE RESTORATION WITH JOY.

“But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet, and bring hither the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and be merry ; for this my son was dead and is alive again, was lost and is found !”

The father adorns his son with the garb becoming his station ; and he thus answers his prayers by what he *does*, rather than by what he *says*. In this way, too, the penitent sinner discovers the fact of his reconciliation with God. No answer is given to his prayers in direct words, for the heavens are silent ; nor can he discover the Holy Spirit of adoption *in* his mysterious workings ; but, nevertheless, *from* what God’s Spirit has accomplished in his soul, he has sufficient evidence to make him “rejoice in hope” that his prayers have indeed entered into the ears of his Father, and that he *has* been met by Him according to the richness of his grace, though as yet he is “a great way off !” He may experience, as he never did before, a softening of the heart, from a sense of the long-suf-

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fering and love of God towards him; and perceive the vile and daring nature of sin in relation to God; and see, in a new light, the excellency and glory of Christ, as man's only and all-sufficient Redeemer from the guilt and dominion of sin, and as the very pattern of his life; and he may resolve, with a simplicity and integrity of purpose hitherto unknown, and with a sense of his own utter weakness, and of the omnipotence of the Saviour, hitherto unfelt, to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; and he may find a nourishment in the Word of God, and a strength and blessedness in communion with God, and an attractiveness in the House of God, and in the people of God, and a hungering and thirsting after the things of God, — all of which not only make up a different *kind* of life from what he has hitherto known, but also afford an evidence of the reality of the power, the knowledge, and the love of God his Father! He has received an answer to his prayers, in what has been accomplished in his soul, by a power which never came from self, but which he knows has come from God. He may not

be able to explain to others in words, except to those like-minded with himself, *what* God has done for him, or *how* He has done it; but to himself the fact is felt to be true—that he was once dead, and is now alive,—once a prodigal, and now a son, who cries from the depths of a heart reconciled to God through Christ, and possessing the spirit of adoption, “Abba, Father!”

What a delightful picture is this feast of joy, —representing, as it does, the comforting and glorious truth, that the sinner’s return to God is a source of gladness, not only to himself, but also to others! Who rejoiced in his loss? Not his *pious* friends! It was a bitterness more than death to them to see one whom they loved pursuing his journey along a path the very opposite of their own, and which must separate them for ever. Not the angels! for they might well share “a holy sadness” in beholding an immortal spirit forsaking the glorious One whose presence was fulness of joy, and departing from their Father’s house to the outer darkness of wickedness and woe. No one but Satan, the liar and the murderer, could have “taken any pleasure in the death of the sinner.” But how

many rejoice when that sinner returns! Who can express the joy of a pious father, or mother, or friend, in seeing the prodigal restored, and in anticipating a union of blessedness with their beloved one for ever! It is joy to the Church on earth and to the Church in heaven; for "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over *one* sinner that repenteth!" Those holy ones sympathise with the Saviour; they know that saving lost sinners was "the joy set before Him," and that it is the reward of his loving heart. When, therefore, one sinner is saved, they welcome this addition to their holy family, and are ready to fly to his aid, and minister to him as an heir of salvation.

Nor can we imagine such an event as this to be less interesting to the redeemed from the earth, or that they cannot know or cannot share the joy of their angel brothers. Surely the great missionary spirits who have passed to glory have never ceased to feel an overwhelming interest in the spread of Christ's kingdom upon earth, nor become less capable, but more so, of rejoicing in the conversion of sinners. And can it be, that the saintly parent, whose life may have been

spent in prayers for his child, or whose grey hairs may have been brought down with sorrow to the grave because of his ungodliness,—or that the brother or sister to whom, while on earth, the salvation of this beloved one had been ^{their} deepest anxiety, and his impiety their deepest anguish,—can it be that they form an exception in the joy in heaven occasioned by his repentance, or that his restoration to Christ and to themselves will not awaken a song of praise which no one but themselves can sing!

The condition of a godless and Christless soul is not perceived by men, because of their blindness and unbelief, to be the awful thing which it is said to be in God's word, and known to be in hell and heaven. His real state is concealed from the eye of sense; and, instead of the spectacle of a lost and ruined soul being seen,—a spectacle the most terrible which the universe contains,—men see, perhaps, fascinating manners only, elegant accomplishments, winning amiabilities, the sallies of wit, or the displays of genius. The evil is, not that mankind do not see the fact beneath all this fiction—for if they did so, human life could hardly, perhaps, be endured—

but that the sinner himself does not see it,—and the deception is increased by the fair names and easy terms which are applied to his condition. He is “careless,”—or “thoughtless,”—or, “good, but not religious,” &c. Yet, how is such an one described in this parable? even as one “*dead*,” “*lost*.” “Dead in trespasses and sins.” “Lost” to peace and good—lost to God—lost to the whole family of God. The world, it may be, imagines that he, above most men, knows what *life* is, and that he would be quite lost to his family and society if he became a saint. But it is not so in heaven. This moral resurrection of the immortal spirit to the life of Christ—this recovery of a lost being of immense value—is fully estimated by the angels; and so they deem it meet to be glad, because this brother was dead, and is alive again—was lost, but is found!

THE GADARENE DEMONIAK.

"And they came over unto the other side of the sea, into the country of the Gadarenes," &c. &c.—ST. MARK V. 1-20.

AFTER a night of storm, in which our Lord displayed his power as the King of Nature, by stilling the winds and the waves, so that there was a great calm, He landed on the shore of the inland sea of Tiberias, there to manifest his power as the Lord of the human spirit and the King of grace, by giving peace to the tempest-tossed soul of a miserable man.

On landing He was immediately met by one who seemed scarcely human. His body was bronzed by summer's heat, emaciated by hunger, and bleeding from self-inflicted torture. His eyes were fierce and fiery, his hair long and matted, and

there hung around him a savage wildness which at once inspired fear and pity. His dwelling was among the caves of the dead. There he might be seen prowling by day like a wild beast, and there he might be heard howling by night; and how he lived was known alone to Him who feeds the beasts of the desert!

Such was the strange being who met Jesus Christ. And what a meeting it was! The contrast between the rugged shore and the calm sea was not so striking as that between the wild Demoniac and the calm and peaceful Son of God. This was a meeting of the representatives of two different kingdoms—the kingdom of darkness and that of light; of hate, and of love; of evil, and of good; of misery, and of peace.

The Gadarene knew who Jesus Christ was, yet, full of terror, he cried, "What have I to do with thee?" and implored him to depart. But the Lord *had* to do with him, and would not therefore depart, but commanded the demons to depart, and they did so; and then the wild man came to his right mind, and sat clothed at the feet of his deliverer meek and calm as a weaned child. He who asked Christ to depart now prayed to be allowed

to follow Him. His prayer was refused ; but he was sent back to Decapolis with these words :—
“Go to thine own house, and show what things the Lord hath done for thee, and how He hath had compassion upon thee.” And he did so, and eventually proclaimed the glad tidings to the whole city.

Such are the leading facts of the marvellous history which I have selected as the subject of my address, and which, by God’s blessing, I trust will prove instructive, both as revealing the nature of sin and its remedy, and also those duties towards others which become us for whom the Lord has done such great things.

I notice briefly that we have in this man’s history a most instructive evidence of the capacity of an immortal being to sink into the depths of sin and misery. For we have here no speculative question of future sin and suffering in another world, but the fact of misery in this present world ; and that, too, from the influence of evil. Unfallen beings in some distant world of purity and bliss, as yet unsullied by the stain of sin, and whose history has been as yet unmarked by the departure of one prodigal from God as his Father, or by the rebellion of one

subject against Him as the King—such holy and happy beings might indeed reject as a mere terrible creation of the imagination, as one not representing a possible reality, the thought of any other world containing any persons who could become wicked and miserable, even for a day, under the benign and loving government of their God. Would not God's almighty power prevent such a calamity, or his boundless love provide against it, or his inexhaustible wisdom contrive innumerable expedients to render it impossible? They might imagine so, but how different is it with us! For here is an immortal being, created after God's image, whose chief end is to glorify Him, and enjoy Him for ever; here he is in this fair world which was declared by God to be very good; here, in the very presence of Jesus Christ, and of his holy apostles; here, in such sin and misery that his only prayer to the Son of God is, "Depart from me," and his only emotion one of dread terror—"Art thou come to torment me?" And, alas! this, in its essential features, is not an exceptional case, but one of many. Oh, dread mystery of evil!—but oh, stern fact! Well, indeed may sin terrify us; and well may the thought suggest itself to us on

beholding a spectacle like this, that if such be the devil's service and wages in this world over which Christ reigns, and on which He bestows his blessing, what must sin and suffering be in the world to come, where the sinner is left to himself?

I admit that there were peculiarities in the Demoniac, which to some extent put his history beyond the limits of ordinary experience. Still his conviction that he was possessed by demons was not a delusion. It is clearly and unquestionably the intention of the narrative to teach this as a fact, however inexplicable and mysterious. Those evil spirits had a distinct and personal existence, for they spoke to Christ through the man; the truthful Christ replied to them; at their own request He sent them into the swine; and, as a sign of the reality of this transaction, the swine rushed down a steep place into the sea. On the other hand, who those demons were; what was the condition of their existence; how they could possibly enter into, possess, or leave a human body or soul; and how they could make either the instrument of their will—all this is utterly unknown to us, belonging as it does to other spheres of spiritual being, of whose laws we know nothing.

For the truth of the fact we rely solely upon the authority of one who knew the unseen world, and who cannot lie. But granting the peculiarities in the case of the Demoniac, and granting also that his peculiar form of spiritual evil may have passed away ; yet it is more than probable that he and all others who were its slaves must have voluntarily yielded themselves to evil before they were led captive according to the will of such spirits, and that at no time were they such slaves as to be without responsibility, in consenting to a power and in yielding themselves to a will which can work only in the children of disobedience. Be these things, however, as they may, we have a fearful illustration here of the desperate condition of all sinners, and the necessity of their deliverance being effected by a supernatural power—even the power of the loving Saviour, Jesus Christ.

But we must examine this revelation of evil in a human soul a little closer. And if we do so, I think we shall discern in this man, not, as I have said, a rare and exceptional case—not a being coming to us from another sphere beyond that of our every-day experience—not a wild and irresponsible maniac, who has nothing in common with

ourselves, whose state suggests to us no warning, and teaches us no practical lesson—but, on the contrary, one in whom we may easily discern the most dreadful of all spectacles—humanity, without love to God or man !

Looking at this man as a type of humanity without God, I do not see any very wide gulf separating him in spirit from many a case of evil, even in this world. As we read statistics of crime, and glance our eye over the many thousands who are every year ranked among criminals, we forget that each figure there represents an immortal being, with soul, body, and spirit like ourselves. Such persons being “out of sight,” become too often “out of mind.” The thick walls of our jails and penitentiaries shut out the spectacle of their sin and misery, or the great ocean rolls between us and them, until they are to us as if they were not. What care we, except on selfish grounds, what becomes of them? The colonies cry, “Do not send them here !” and we echo back the cry. But could we see the inner spirits of those men and women, and enter those human catacombs, should we not discover as vile lusts, ferocious passions, devilish wiles, determined wickedness—as great

slavery to evil, as great a mystery of iniquity, as desperate a condition of depravity, as was revealed in the Gadarene Demoniac? Oh! what an evil spirit among the tombs is even one wicked soul! For here lie passions foul and corrupt; young feelings long ago dead; hopes lost; talents buried; with conscience tormenting it day and night, and with no prayer to God but, "Depart from me; torment me not before my time!" One of the most common spectacles, alas! in our country, that of drunkenness, is itself a very embodiment, almost, of this form of evil. See the drunkard flying from his home, snapping asunder every chain that would bind him, whether of worldly prudence, tender affection, or solemn warning; see him wandering by day, bruised, bleeding, and naked; hear him howling like a demon by night; behold him a terror to the wife of his bosom, and to the children who call him father; and in this see, in a Christian land, a picture of sin and misery more affecting, because more inexcusable, than that of the Gadarene Demoniac among the tombs.

And must we not bring this evil in humanity still nearer ourselves? It seems, indeed, extrava-

gant and exaggerated to compare people called respectable and respected, with such a man as this. It looks at first sight as outrageous as if we were to classify the society of this country with that of savage lands. It surely cannot be that that fair woman, for example, the admired of intellect and rank ; or that king surrounded by flattering courtiers ; or that industrious farmer, with his quiet and peaceful country life and labour ; or that man of luxury and social enjoyment ; or that minister preaching the Gospel and converting sinners ;—it surely cannot be that such persons as those can ever come to this, and before God be as lost and miserable as this Demoniac ? Yet, worse it was with the fair and fascinating Herodias and her daughter ; worse with the “fool” whose soul was suddenly summoned from his barns and selfish ease to the presence of God ; worse with “Dives” of the sumptuous fare, the purple and fine linen ; worst of all with Judas, the disciple and preacher, who stood that very day beside Christ when He cast the evil spirit out of the Gadarene. And infinitely worse it will be with any of us who live and die without God.

Now what was essentially wrong in this man ?

It was his wrong mind. He was delivered from that by being brought to "his right mind." And if a man's heart is wrong; if he is not reconciled to God; if he is not at peace with Him;—if he is yet under the government of self; and if this self is his end and his rule, then what matters it whether his disease be covered with a ragged or a silken garment?—for the disease is there! What matters it whether the leprosy is as yet but a small white spot on him, or is broken out in a hideous and loathsome form over his whole body?—the leprosy is there! Men judge by outward appearances, but God goes deeper down and judges the heart; and that heart, if it has not received the grace of God, is to itself deceitful, and to God desperately wicked. While we therefore look upon this miserable Gadarene Demoniac, let us see in him, to what we must come, unless the Lord Jesus Christ casts our sin out and brings us into a right mind.

Before we consider what Jesus did to this man, observe still more closely and carefully his desperate condition. His friends tried to bind him with chains; but all in vain. He broke them asunder and was off to the tombs, separating himself from

every tie, and becoming a terror to all who passed that way. This pictures very vividly the many attempts made by men without the assistance of God to overcome evil, either in the individual or in society. It illustrates the vanity of every attempt by mere outward power to subdue human corruption. Many are the chains which we may cast around the spirit—such as those of prudence, domestic happiness, education, labour, law, police, punishment and bondage, before we try the scaffold. Much may thus be done, no doubt, to keep vice and crime from encroaching on the liberty and enjoyment of others; much to keep both within respectable bounds. But while it may be questioned whether these chains can in any case prevent sin from passing into crime, in no case can they convert the soul from self-idolatry to the worship and obedience of the living God. They may bind the man, but they cannot change him; they may chain the demon of evil, but they cannot cast him out, or ever impart the right state of mind instead of the wrong. Jesus alone has the power and authority to do this. “There is none other name given under heaven whereby man can be saved.” He alone who is stronger than “the

strong man" can enter our hearts and keep possession of them, filling them with his own holiness and peace.

Let us now look at the meeting of the Demoniac with the Saviour. It was verily a crisis in the sad life of this miserable man. He met Jesus indeed with a prayer; but with what a prayer of ignorance and of agony!

The inner conflict in this man's spirit on meeting Jesus represents the struggle in many a heart, during a similar crisis in its history. When, for example, the Saviour comes in all the majesty of his divine authority, with all the grace and loveliness of divine clemency, to deliver the sinner from evil and from misery, his cry often is, "Torment me not." He does not see in Jesus a giver, but a taker away,—not a restorer, but a robber of happiness,—not a deliverer, but an executioner. The covetous man cries, "Torment me not" by taking away, or by bidding me give thee any of my gold; the sensualist, "Torment me not" by commanding me to deny my passions; the self-willed, the proud, the vain, the ambitious,—in one word, the self-indulgent, cry, "Torment us not" by coming to us

with thy cross and burial. And is this our welcome to Him who left Heaven to bring us there—who took on Him the form of a servant to make us sons of God—who agonised and died on the cross to have the joy of giving us eternal life? Alas! men speak of Him as if He were the demon who came to torment their souls, and as if the demon of sin was their friend who delivered them from unreasonable tyrants and set them free in the liberty of evil. It may indeed be true that, in so far as feeling and desire go, we have had little to do with Jesus. How often have we separated ourselves from Him! We are proud to confess that we have to do with business, with riches, with rank, with fashion, with science, with literature; but in our unbelief we say to Jesus Christ, “What have I to do with *thee*?” We say this because we are selfish and ignorant sinners, poor and needy, blind and naked, yet knowing it not, but thinking we are rich and increased in goods, and have need of nothing. Nevertheless our Lord, because He is love and will not deny Himself, will not therefore deny even us. He *has*, blessed be God, to do with us. He has done a great work for us, and He will do a greater work in us, and prove his

right to us, and so change us, that it will be our dignity, our highest honour, our peace and joy, to have to do with Him now and for ever. Thus did He prove his love towards the Gadarene, for He cast the demons out of him.

Observe the effects of this great act of love on the hitherto miserable Demoniac. What outward force failed to accomplish, inward principle effected. Once the right mind came, everything else came right. The man became attached to Christ. He saw and recognised Him as a Saviour; he clung to Him, and wished always to be with Him, and was at peace with himself and with others. He was also brought into fellowship with the disciples and the Church of Christ. The enemies of Christ moreover were influenced by him, for they could not deny the fact of his marvellous conversion. They gathered around him and gazed on him. What! is this he who lived among the tombs? Is this the man who used to terrify us? Is this the naked, wild Demoniac who now sits clothed at the feet of Jesus?—It is he! and they had never seen such a sight before. His outward physical condition was also changed—"he sat *clothed*." Outward decency was the effect and sign of inward reformation.

Such is the spectacle presented to us by this convert ; and such will be the results, more or less, in every case where a soul is truly brought to the knowledge and love of God in Jesus Christ. Terror for Christ will give place to love. Peace will reign in the heart from faith in the love of God reconciled through a crucified Saviour. The heart will be drawn not only to Jesus, but to his disciples. Old and careless friends will see the difference in tastes, habits, and that whole *something*, which makes up a man's changed character and ways. If the wrong mind moreover tends to degrade a man outwardly, the right mind tends to elevate him. Industry, prudence, decency, follow the conviction that he belongs to Christ, and that he ought therefore "to glorify Him in soul and body, which are his." This, and this alone, is the true radical reform, which proceeds from within outwards. Other things may help this, but this is the thing itself.

Notice, further, that when Jesus cast out the demon, the Gadarene prayed that he might be allowed to follow Him. Strange to say, this prayer offered up by a true disciple was the only one which Jesus did not answer in the way requested.

The demons, for example, prayed that they might be permitted to enter the swine, and their prayer was granted. The Gadarenes prayed that Jesus might depart from their coasts, and their prayer was also granted. But when this his redeemed servant asked to be allowed to follow Him, his prayer was refused. Ah, brethren! some prayers may be answered in judgment, and some refused in mercy; yet those which seem to us unanswered are really answered in a better, though in a different, form from that which the petitioner imagined; the Lord thus doing more than he could ask or think. Thus, if we ask, in a right spirit, though a mistaken judgment, for a serpent when we require a fish, or a stone when we really need bread, the Lord will answer our requests according to the spirit by refusing them according to the letter, and by giving us the bread and the fish, not the stone and the serpent.

But let us inquire why this man asked to be allowed to follow Jesus.

It may have been from personal love; in order to be always with his Deliverer,—to see his face, to hear his words, and to enjoy his fellowship. Well, all this he will one day be able to do; but,

in the mean time, his love to God must be evidenced in another form,—that is, by his doing missionary work in his own family.

Or, again, the prayer may have been offered from a trembling fear lest those dreadful demons of the olden time should return, with the departure of Jesus. But the Gadarene need fear no evil; for the power and grace which cast them out will keep them out. The Lord Himself, though absent in the flesh, will be ever present with him, through his Spirit.

Or, finally, his prayer may have been offered from shame for his fellow-countrymen, who had asked the Lord of life and of peace to depart and leave their coasts. These men, possessed by the demon of selfishness, lamented the loss of their swine more than they rejoiced over the gain of a brother. It was natural enough, therefore, that this man should wish to leave such uncongenial society. Yet the worse the people of Decapolis were, the more they required a missionary: and, accordingly, if the Lord will depart from them in judgment, yet in the midst of judgment He will remember mercy, by giving them as a missionary to save their souls the man whom He had Himself saved, and who

was no longer a terror to them. No one was certainly better qualified to show what great things the Lord had done. And so Jesus says, "Go to thy friends," or as it is expressed in another Gospel, "Go to thine own house, and show what great things the Lord hath done for thee."

We read that he did so. And what a missionary he would be! He had friends who once felt tenderly towards him, but whom he had long estranged by his ungodly ways. He may have had a father and a mother who had spent many a sleepless night thinking of their poor prodigal, especially when the storm was loud, and he was alone with the demons among the tombs. He may have had a wife, who thought, with burning tears, of her husband, who once, and perhaps still was, the love of her heart. He may have had children, to whom their father had been a terror and a mystery as they gathered around their mother's knee, like scared birds, when they heard his voice and his steps coming near the door. To be the acquaintance, the parents, the wife, or the children of a demon-possessed man—how dreadful was the thought! He has dragged them all with him into the abyss, and tormented them through his sin. In vain they

have tried to bind him with chains. Many a painful struggle to do so has that house witnessed. Upon its wall the chains are perhaps still hanging, with the thought of their being used again and with better hopes of success. Now, however, since the man has met Jesus, these chains are no longer required. The friend, son, brother, husband, father, returns ; his face calm as an inland sea, and shining as if he were fresh from Tabor's hill. His mother can see in his eyes those of her child again, yet more innocent and beautiful ; the wife can discern the old familiar look of earthly love transfigured into heavenly grace ; the children can climb his knees and kiss his face, still marked by the scars of the old battles among the tombs, yet full of love that casteth out fear, and whose every look and word is to their young hearts refreshing as the dew of Hermon.

O blessed Jesus ! what a light and glory art Thou in the heart and in the home !

THE HOME MISSION WORK OF CHRISTIANS.

BEING THE SECOND PART OF THE "GADARENE DEMONIAK."

*"And they came over unto the other side of
the sea, into the country of the Gada-
renes," &c. &c.—ST. MARK V. 1-20.*

THE subject of my last address to you was the portion of the history of the Gadarene Demoniac, illustrating the effects of evil in the human spirit, with the power of Christ as a Deliverer. We saw how the demoniac was restored to his "right mind," and sat clothed at the feet of Jesus; how he prayed to be allowed to follow Him; and how Jesus, while refusing to grant this request, yet gave him something far better, by commanding him to go to his own home, and there show what great things the Lord had done for him, and how He had compassion upon him.

This commission which our Lord assigned to his young disciple, suggests the subject of my address to you this evening, which is the Home Mission Work of Christians.

I may notice in passing, that there is incidentally mentioned in this narrative an apparently unimportant fact. We read that by the command of their Master, a boat was prepared by his disciples for his reception, and it was in it He was pleased to cross the lake and reach the miserable sufferers. Now this is a symbol of those means which we are commanded to adopt in order to bring Christ into contact with sinners. Jesus could have crossed the lake without the boat ; he had already trodden its waters, and on this very occasion had displayed his power over its stormy waves. But these were exceptions to his method of crossing the inland sea ; while this rule was to use the ordinary means adopted by other men for accomplishing this purpose. And so with reference to our duties towards those who are ignorant of Jesus Christ, the question is not whether our Lord can directly communicate truth to sinners, or through the ministration of angels convert them, or whether he can save

them without any plans being organised by the Church, or any personal sacrifices or exertions made by its members. "He does not require our aid," it might be argued, if what is a revealed duty were a mere matter of speculation. It is quite true that without material churches, and printed Bibles, educated missionaries, and all the prosaic matter-of-fact details of subscriptions, collections, and accounts, Jesus Christ can reach and convert a soul. But the fact is, that he has committed the doing of this work to men of flesh and blood, with all their infirmities and short-comings; and, to accomplish it, they are necessarily obliged to build churches, and equip and support missionaries. Now to do all this, material money, like the boat, is required. Hence what we call a worldly thing is thus sanctified by its being consecrated to the Master's use; and the natural becomes the medium by which the supernatural is brought into operation; and the giving of our worldly substance in Christ's cause with all its apparatus which might seem to be a mere dead mechanical machinery, is changed into a privilege which Christ bestows on his Church, and which he authoritatively commands as a duty, as imperative and as essential to the

Christian life as what is supposed to be more exclusively spiritual, such as prayer or the partaking of the sacraments.

But what I wish, as I have said, to direct your attention to, is that other kind of mission work which is expressed in the command, "Go to thy brethren and to thine own house, and show what great things the Lord hath done for thee." This may be called the home mission of Christians, or that which is given every man to do for the good of others, who has truly experienced himself "what great things the Lord hath done for him."

Now every man who is entitled to the name of Christian, knows in some degree what great things the Lord has done for him, and how He has had compassion upon him. He knows that He came to seek and save him; that He loved him and gave Himself for him; that He rose for his justification, and ever liveth to make intercession for him. He knows that he has given him his Holy Spirit to be with him, and in him, as the Spirit of adoption, whereby he can with filial, confiding heart say Father; and as the

Spirit of power by which he can overcome sin and strive after new obedience ; and as the Spirit of wisdom to direct his steps ; and as the Spirit of comfort to sustain his heart ; and as the Spirit of hope to look forward to a blessed immortality. He knows that the Lord hath done these great things for him as truly as the wretched Gadarene knew that he was set free and restored by Christ's Divine love and power to himself, his family, and his God.

To every man, therefore, who knows this to be true in his own history, however inadequately or imperfectly the blessing may be realised, the Lord says, "Go to thine own house, and show what great things the Lord hath done for thee."

Let us look at this sphere of missionary labour, in which every Christian is to be the missionary agent. It is our own house. By this is meant that circle made up of our relations, friends, companions, and those with whom we come most into contact. The house of the sailor may be his ship—of the soldier, his camp—of the working man, his fellow-workmen. But many have a more fixed and abiding home—the home of do-

mestic life, and of that blessed institution the family, with the holy bonds of husband and wife, parents and children, masters and servants; yet including within a wider circle our friends and acquaintances who cannot but be influenced by what we ourselves are and by what we do.

This is a mission field for every Christian; and it is so for several reasons, which will at once suggest themselves to you. Our own house, for example, has the first claim upon us. Charity, if it begins anywhere, begins here, wherever it may end. Those in our own home are specially *given* us by God. They are ours, not from choice, but from Providence. We may select our acquaintances or friends; but those called our blood relations, our parents, brothers, and sisters, are selected for us and assigned to us as gifts to be accepted from God, and used according to his will. They are our own flesh and blood,—parts of our very selves,—bound up with us in the bundle of life. Even our friends or acquaintances, though chosen by us at first, cannot afterwards be cast off as if they did not belong to us. The choice we have made involves duty; and our duty

is to make them, if possible, better and happier than we found them.

The members of our home may be poor, and we may be wealthy ;—they may be infirm in body or in mind, and we may be strong in both ;—they may be difficult to bear with in their tempers, and other infirmities, and we, by grace, may have overcome these evils ; or, what is just as likely, may yet require patience and consideration from others, because of these our own failings. But in any case, the fact is, that God has given to us, as our special field of Christian missionary labour, our own family circle, “our house,” which we dare not selfishly deny or cast away. And surely it is wise and merciful in our Father thus to commit to our charge those who are in a special sense one with us, and in whom we cannot, from the very instincts of our nature, but feel an interest more than in others, and to aid whom is “an holy religion of the heart?” The prophet Isaiah (58th chapter) in awful language reproves the people in his day who professed to be religious, but of whom God said, “They seek me daily, and delight to know my ways, as a nation that did righteousness, and forsook not the ordinances of

justice ; they take delight in approaching God." They also fasted, and afflicted their souls ; and bowed down their heads as bulrushes. Yet in spite of all this, they had no real religion, for they had no real love. And the prophet is commanded to cry aloud, and spare not, but to tell God's people their transgressions, and the house of David their sins. And he sums up their duties by this command, "*that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh.*" Is not this one with our Lord's teaching, that we *show*, and not hide, to *our own house* what great things the Lord has done for us? Let us then cheerfully accept home as the first, the most important sphere in which to live and labour as Christians. Our natural feelings will thus become a basis for spiritual religion, and the love of our dear friends be a noble preparation, for the love of our brethren and of mankind. It will prevent, moreover, our religion from evaporating into a mere empty sentiment, by thus giving it definite objects on which to act. The very differences that may exist among the members of the household, and which I have already hinted at, thus become an education in the love which seeketh not her own.

Again ;—to show to our own house what great things the Lord hath done for us, is the very duty which any kind of religious fervour demands, in order to prevent it from dying out like a fire that leaves nothing but ashes behind, or from being spent like a fresh flowing stream in mere noise and foam without doing any practical good. Many a man or woman in the first glow of their new convictions in regard to unseen realities, when truth formerly dead became alive and real to them—when they experienced what is called “a revival,” have often been much more disposed to go forth as speaking missionaries to the world in general, than to go to their own house, and there remain, to show in quiet and peace what God has done for them. But the very excitement which is so congenial to them, is the very thing most hurtful to them ; it tends to vanity, spiritual pride, and ultimately to heartless indifference. The life of unobtrusive manifestation of genuine piety at home is what they most need, and that just in proportion as they feel it to be an irksome restraint upon their strong and enthusiastic feelings. I repeat it, that if these feelings are not to be feelings only, belonging to the flesh,

though they seem to belong to the spirit, and if they are not finally to pass off into thin air, leaving the soul dry and parched, they must be concentrated first of all on "our own house," and there gather the strength made up of wisdom and humility which will make them, if God will, to be of use to the "whole city."

Once more : our religion, as seen in "our own house," is the best test of the reality of our Christian character.

If I wish to know what a man really is, let me only know what he is at home, and what his intimate friends know him to be. Tell me what his temper, his ways, his influence are at home, and I will determine accordingly what he himself is.

Our home, lastly, is the field which we can cultivate better than any other. Our intimate knowledge of its members ; our frequent opportunities of coming into contact with them ; and the innumerable links that bind us to each other, make it the first and the best place in which to exercise a good influence ; in which to show what great things the Lord hath done for us ; and to make those we most love on earth partakers of our own spiritual blessings. We can do work at

home which no one else can do as well as ourselves ; for if we have nothing real to show at home, depend upon it we have nothing real to show abroad.

We are further taught, by the history of this Gadarene, the way in which this home mission work is to be carried on. It is chiefly by our *life*; by what we *are*. When the Lord has done great things for a man's spirit, the things done will reveal themselves in the power and eloquence of a good life. The life within, of peace with God, and a desire to serve Him, will necessarily express itself by fitting word, look, and temper; by silence and by speech; by what is done, and by the way of doing it; by what is left undone; by those signs, in short, of moral health which are perceived and felt by all who come into contact with the missionary. The light within our dwelling emanating from us may be dim, as if struggling through the mists of morning; but it is light nevertheless, and not the old darkness. The life may be weak, but it is real. There will ever be that almost indescribable *something* in the whole bearing of the true man, who is in sympathy with God,—whether

at the festive board, in a scene of sorrow, or in times of family difficulty and bereavement, as well as in the ordinary on-goings of every-day life,—which will impress the hearts of others with the conviction that this man sees some person who to them is invisible; that he leans upon, to them, an unknown arm; that he enjoys a strength and a peace the world never gave; and that he has an actual possession of what is a practical power, able to mould his life and actions. And this kind of “showing” what great things the Lord hath done—this kind of preaching in the family and among friends—is not the less influential, but the more so, from its unconsciousness and the absence of all effort or plan, and as being the natural expression of what is real and habitual.

And this influence of a good life does not exclude a more direct showing, by spoken word, of what the Lord has done for ourselves, and what He is willing and able to do for all. Innumerable opportunities will be given thus to make Christ known as the Saviour of sinners to those who know Him not. It may be to a young man as he is about to journey to a foreign land; or during a walk with a companion in a summer evening; or when visiting

a dying friend at midnight, when all the house is still ; or when amidst the afflictions and desolation of a bereaved family ;—in these and many similar instances, he who has experienced the patience, forbearance, and goodness of the Lord, can speak to others the fitting word in sympathy and gentleness, which will deliver their feet from falling and their minds from going down to the pit, and bring to them life, liberty, and peace. If we only desire to “do good unto all, as we have an opportunity,” depend upon it, God will give the opportunity. If we only realised that it is indeed “more blessed to give than to receive,” we should have more to give and a deeper blessing to receive.

Now, these opportunities of showing the compassion of our Lord to ourselves are really given to every member of the household. The Christian servant in the kitchen, the Christian nurse among the children or beside the sick-bed, the Christian old man in the arm-chair beside the fire, each and all, if themselves good, cannot choose but bestow lasting good, in some form, by their unselfish life, their humility, gentleness, faith, and love. By simply doing their duty as Christians, they may be ministers of Christ, and epistles written

by the finger of the Spirit, which all can read. In prescribing this home mission work, we cannot say to the feeblest member of the body, we have no need for thee. That decrepit or infirm one, who has been confined to a sick-bed for years, who has never known one day's health since she was received into her mother's arms, and pressed to her bosom with that special tenderness which the weak draw forth from a mother's yearning heart; or that sick one to whom the glories of the midnight sky, the beauty of the summer field, are unknown, may, nevertheless, be the greatest gifts of God to the house in which they live or die, and most eloquent and influential missionaries. For the peaceful and submissive spirit of the sufferer, the cheerful smile, the words of meekness and acts of considerate love, all show day and night what the Lord has done. Such a missionary is like the beauteous rainbow that rests upon the bosom of the sky, unbroken by the strong wind and stormy tempest, appearing indeed more bright from the darkness with which it is surrounded, reflecting the light of heaven through misty tears, and bending over our earthly home as the sign of a holy covenant of peace. Ah, my friends, realise as

above all price—above all gifts of rank, of talent, and fortune—the gift of one person in your family who has experienced, and can show forth, what great things the Lord hath done for him or her.

Such is the mission of the members of the Christian Church. It originates in the renewed heart, and it works in the house. But it need not be circumscribed within such narrow limits. There, indeed, it first bestows its riches; but by giving, these are increased. It pours forth its streams of charity there, but these only make the charity more abundant; and accordingly, when the fitting time comes, God will give to the home-missionary other poor and needy ones on which to lavish his affections; other thirsty and parched deserts which he can refresh and gladden. For it may happen to him at home as it did to the Gadarene demoniac, who, after showing in his own house “what the Lord hath done for him,” at last proclaimed the glad tidings to “the whole city.” He who thus uses his one talent for the good of his family, may receive from the Lord ten talents more to use for the good of his country and of the world.

And this kind of home mission work is more urgently required in our land, than we are apt to think or able even fully to understand.

“The Lord has need” of every agency—the Church with its ministry, prayers, sacraments, and preaching. The platform and the press, with science and art, must also be enlisted in his service by being all used for Christian ends. But not the official ministrations of the Church, though ordained of God, far less the official ministrations of any self-constituted “religious” committee, can be substitutes for the labours of ten thousand missionaries in their several homes. The Lord may not be in the earthquake of widespread agitation, nor in the hurricane of passionate invective, nor in the loud thunder of party condemnation ; while he may reveal himself in the still small voice of unobtrusive and home religion. If we receive truth in the Church, and if we worship in the Church, let us see that we manifest the results of these blessings in private life. Neither I nor you are likely to underrate the immense importance of missions acting from without upon the mass of our population. We know and appreciate their necessity ; but I think we are apt to underrate

the vast importance of this home mission. The lights in our streets are of importance, but still more so are the lights in our several dwellings.

The home mission is required, too, for the rich as well as for the poor. Ignorance and sin are too much associated in our minds with the poor only. For is Dives in no danger? Has he necessarily received Christian instruction? Has he been in the habit of attending public worship? Does he really know the truths of the Gospel, the power of God's Spirit, and the reality of divine life? Nay, is it certain that with all his knowledge he has ever read the Bible, or even one book of the Bible, with prayer and earnest attention? Are self-denial, Christian thankfulness, or the love of Christ, more characteristic of the rich and comfortable than of the poor and needy? And if society requires to be leavened with the Christian element, how are we to do this, if, as is often the case, the services of our Church are neglected by the rich, and the Word of God unread, and the claims of Christ rejected? Ah! we visit the homes of the poor, and so far poverty is made the occasion of blessing, when to them the Gospel is preached and kindly sympathy manifested. We can enter their dwellings, and

question them in a kind and brotherly way as to their religious habits and beliefs, and preach the Gospel to them, with all its solemn warnings and sweet promises. But who will take these liberties with the higher classes? Who knocketh at *their* door, and ever questions or instructs them? Therefore I say both poor and rich require this home mission work. We require above all things that Christians shall teach Christianity in every home by showing in their own lives what Christianity *is*, and by proving from what they are, from what they can do and resist, can bear with and enjoy, that it is a power acting within the soul for subduing sin, and producing a character which every man must recognise as being worthy of all praise and imitation. Alas! how have we all betrayed the glorious cause of God by our careless and selfish lives! What false impressions have we given of that Saviour whom we profess to serve and follow! What hearts have we chilled by our coldness! What indifference in others have we confirmed by our own! What practical infidelity have we occasioned by our practical unbelief! What little good and how much evil have we done to those in our own home by our weak faith towards Christ,

and our great cowardice in confessing him! Let every Christian, then, do his duty in the place in which God his master has put him. Let every one who has experienced the compassion of Christ, be compassionate to others. Let the love which seeketh not its own, and the grace of God which is made strong in our weakness, attract miserable souls out of themselves to trust in their God.

One word in conclusion. If we live and die in Christ, we shall one day meet the Gadarene demoniac. He has been long in glory. He no longer wanders among the tombs, but is amidst the splendours of the unseen world. The awful nightmare of his own life is remembered in the far distance, and while it is remembered, it but kindles his soul to praise his adorable Redeemer. The tombs of corruption have long been exchanged for the palace of the Great King; the demons have given place for eighteen centuries to God's own holy and loving spirit; and he no longer cries day and night, but joins the halleluiahs of the upper sanctuary. No one there is afraid of him, but all love him and rejoice with him. He sees not in his Saviour now

one who is coming to torment, but one who died and lives evermore to bless him. His body is no longer bleeding from self-inflicted torment, but shines with all the glory of the redeemed. He is no longer naked, but sits clothed in the righteousness of Christ, and for all eternity he will show what great things the Lord hath done for him!

PRAYER.

PART I.

*“ And when ye pray, say, Our Father which
art in heaven,” &c. &c.—ST. LUKE
xi. 2.*

I AM now to offer you a few thoughts explanatory of one of our most certain duties and most ennobling privileges ;—the duty and privilege of Prayer.

WHAT IS PRAYER ?

Prayer is communion with God. It is, therefore, the speaking with heart or lip by one living person to another.

There need surely be no difficulty in apprehending what this means. Every one knows very well what is meant by a child speaking to, or holding communion with, a parent. We under-

stand what is meant by a child expressing his love for father or mother by word or look ; and from the reality of his love confessing his faults with sincere repentance, or interceding in behalf of a brother or sister. This is prayer. Nor do we think it strange that a loving parent should be pleased with a child thus acting towards him, or that he should, as far as possible, comply with his requests.

Again, we have no difficulty in understanding what is meant by persons praying to Jesus Christ while He dwelt on earth. We learn from the Gospel history of his life how crowds came to Him wherever He went—how the blind cried to Him to open their eyes that they might see, and the deaf to open their ears that they might hear ; how lepers begged Him to heal their loathsome disease ; how parents interceded with Him for their children, friends for the suffering members of their family, and masters for their servants. On one occasion, for example, we are told that, when the sun was setting, they brought multitudes of the maimed, the sick, and halt to Him, and He healed them all ! Every day of his ministerial life was thus spent amidst countless prayers

from suffering men and women, ending in ceaseless thanksgivings of praise for his inexhaustible patience and love in hearing all, and answering all. The last words ever addressed to Him were a prayer by a dying thief, and his last act was to answer it. We understand all this kind of intercourse, this asking and receiving, this affectionate communion as it existed between Jesus Christ and other people then. Well, prayer is the same kind of intercourse subsisting between Him and all who seek Him now—for Jesus is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever; and He is with us always unto the end of the world! He is as well acquainted with every village on earth as He was with Bethany, with every family as He was with Martha, Mary, and Lazarus, and now, as then, is nigh to all who call on Him.

And again. We understand what is meant by Jesus as the Son of Man praying to God his Father. Such was his constant habit. He prayed without ceasing. He prayed in every place, at all times, and in every variety of circumstance. He prayed among the calm retreats of the mountains, at the tomb of a friend, in the Garden of Gethsemane, in the upper chamber of Jerusalem, and

upon the cross. When He rejoiced in spirit, He said, "I thank Thee, O Father!" "Being in agony, He prayed the more earnestly." In prayer He parted from his disciples on the last evening of his life: He lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, "Father, the hour is come!" In prayer He parted from the world on the cross: "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do." "Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit!"

Jesus has thus taught us the nature of prayer and the spirit of prayer. He has fully revealed to us the character of God as a Father, to whom we are to pray; and He has also revealed in his own person and life, how to respond to the Fatherly love of God by the true spirit of Sonship. For just as He the Elder Brother, who perfectly knew and loved his Father, poured out his heart before Him in all the holy confidence of prayer, so would he have all the members of his family share the same mind towards his God and their God, and like Himself, and with Himself, pray, saying, "Our Father which art in heaven!"

THE DUTY OF PRAYER.

As there never existed a nation which did not believe in some God, so there never existed a nation without some kind of worship. Temples are the oldest and grandest buildings in the world. They have survived almost every other monument of man's handiwork. But if men thus bow down to idols, the work of their own hands, or ignorantly worship an unknown God, shall we not worship the only living and true God our Father in heaven? If not, well may the language of the prophet spoken thousands of years ago to the Jews, be applied with greater condemnation to us:—"For pass over the isles of Chittim, and see; and send unto Kedar, and consider diligently, and see if there be such a thing: Hath a nation changed their gods, which are yet no gods? but my people have changed their glory for that which doth not profit. Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid, be ye very desolate, saith the Lord. For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them

out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water."

Depend upon it, a prayerless spirit is a godless one. Ignorant of prayer, we are as yet ignorant of God. Without it, we are as yet practically "without God in the world."

We need no other argument for prayer than the being and character of God—what He is, and what He to us. If God be indeed our Father,—if the only living and true God is that God whom Jesus knew, and loved, and revealed to us—that God who has been known and loved by the Church and people of God since the world began—the duty and privilege of prayer are as certain as his existence and our own. All objections to prayer, all difficulties which would hinder prayer, vanish before this one fact revealed in Christ, that God is our Father, and before this one blessed command of his eternal Son our Brother, "When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven!"

For — consider it carefully — God being our Father, He cannot be ignorant of his children, of the least, the weakest, the most unworthy or unknown. Accordingly, if there is one Divine fea-

ture more fully revealed in Scripture than another, it is this minute knowledge possessed by God of everything He has made, and of every person. He is never represented, as some men would have Him be, as One so great, so occupied in governing mighty worlds, or so absorbed with the inconceivable and infinite majesty of his own being, as to be ignorant of or indifferent to the so-called trifles, or insignificant works of his hand. No; his greatness, as revealed in Scripture, is of a nature more worthy of the Perfect One. It is a greatness indeed of knowledge which has no limit, of wisdom which frames the smallest insect as well as the greatest world; but at the same time of a love which considers the wants of the widow and orphan. Hear what the Psalmist says of God's greatness:—"Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God; which made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that therein is: which keepeth truth for ever: which executeth judgment for the oppressed: which giveth food to the hungry. The Lord looseth the prisoners. The Lord openeth the eyes of the blind: the Lord raiseth them that are bowed down: the Lord loveth the righteous: the Lord

preserveth the strangers ; he relieveth the fatherless and widow : but the way of the wicked he turneth upside down.”

And this:—“He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds. He telleth the number of the stars ; he calleth them all by their names. Great is our Lord, and of great power : his understanding is infinite.”

The prophet Isaiah speaks, in the same spirit, of God’s greatness, and appeals to the revelation of his majesty and power seen in the starry sky, not as an argument or proof that the Creator is too great to know us, but that being so great He cannot but know us :—“Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number : he calleth them all by name by the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in power ; not one faileth. Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God? Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding. He

giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength." This is, surely, the God revealed in Jesus, and of whom Jesus spoke, when He said, "Your heavenly Father knoweth what things ye have need of." "Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God? But even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows."

If the God we believed in were such a God that He did not know us personally, nor hear us or help us when we called upon Him; or if He had no love, and did not care for us, then verily such a God would not be worth knowing; to love Him, and therefore to pray to Him, would be impossible. But this is not our God—the God and Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. He is great indeed as the Almighty maker and upholder of the heavens and the earth; but he is greater far as a Father who pitieth his children. His name—that by which He is known—is not "Power," but "Love." Love guides His omnipotent power, employs his unerring wisdom, regulates his perfect justice, and itself constitutes

his Majesty. This is the greatness of God—the greatness of his love, which is so finite, yet so infinite ; which a little child can take into his heart and feel, but which an archangel cannot take into his mind and comprehend. It is this greatness of love which is revealed in every page of Scripture—and in all its glory in Jesus Christ, and which is known in the experience of every friend of God.

God thus being our Father, He not only knows us, but loves us. This is implied in his “Name.” To be known only by God as the omniscient and righteous Governor of the universe might itself inspire us with fear, and make us seek any darkness where we could escape the piercing inspection of that Holy Eye. But to be known by God as our Father, inspires us with love, and “casteth out fear, which hath torment.”

David lived only in the morning of that glorious day whose meridian splendour shines on us, nevertheless he knew God as his Father :—“Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him. For he knoweth our frame ; he remembereth that we are dust ;” and believing this, he rejoiced in the thought of his

Father's constant presence ; and that wherever he went, wherever he was, he need fear no evil, for "Thou art with me:" a sentiment expressed more fully still in the 139th Psalm. It was this which made him a man of prayer, and inspired his songs of praise, which will never cease until they are lost in the praises before the Throne. And the more he prayed the more was his confidence in God increased and his love deepened. "I love the Lord, because he hath heard the voice of my supplication." "I will call upon the name of the Lord as long as I live!" And this is the God revealed in Jesus his Eternal Son, to whom we are to say, "Our Father." This Fatherly heart Jesus would lead us up to, as the unfailing and inexhaustible source of everything, and as containing in itself an argument for prayer, which every parent and every child can understand. "Ask," He says, "and it shall be given unto you ; seek, and ye shall find ; knock, and it shall be opened unto you : For *every one* that asketh receiveth ; and he that seeketh findeth ; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." And why ? "For," He adds, "what man is there of you, who, if his son ask bread, will he give him

a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent?" Is there any such parent among us? Any, who would deal thus with a starving child who prayed to him for help? I venture to say that there is not one even among the worst! Sympathy with a suffering child is the last feeling that forsakes the heart from which all good may seem to have departed. But are our parental hearts then more tender, more merciful, more sympathising than the heart of God? Hear again the words of our Lord:—"If ye, *being evil*, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your *Father which is in heaven* give good things to them that ask him?" As we hear these words from such a person as Jesus Christ, the Son who came to reveal his Father to us, all objections to prayer must vanish, all difficulties as to its meaning cease, and this prayer be prompted by the heart, "Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief!"

To see prayer to be our noblest duty, then, we have only to know God as He is revealed in Christ Jesus. In that light we shall see light shed upon the spirit of prayer—on all we need and should ask from God. We shall see light on

our own state, and learn what miserable and destitute prodigals we are when away from our Father. In that light we shall see to whom alone we can go for help, even to God our Father from whom we have departed. In that light we shall see our eternal good and peace.

And to realise in some degree what an inconceivably glorious privilege such prayer is, we have only to consider that the poorest man on earth—the most solitary and unknown—knowing only that God Almighty is his Father in Christ—can in any place, at any time, come to God and pour out all his heart before Him, all his cares and sorrows, all his wants and fears, all his sins and manifold shortcomings, and that God will mark his every thought, and hear his every word, and answer that poor man's prayer with the same love as if there was not another in the whole universe but himself to attend to—as if he and God were the only living existences, the only “I and thou,” and no other creature to say “My Father!” to his Creator!

IN WHAT SPIRIT MUST WE PRAY?

1. *We must pray with Faith.*—By faith here I do

not mean the faith of the more advanced Christian. But it is evident that without some faith it is simply impossible, from the very nature of the case, to pray to God at all, or to praise Him. The Apostle tells us :—"He who cometh to God must believe that *He is*, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him." We cannot pray if we are Atheists ! We must believe that "God is," before we can address Him ; and before we can seek Him, we must believe that our search will not be in vain. Does not this encourage those who are afar off as well as those who are near to come to God ? Does it not strengthen the prodigal, in spite of all his sins, and of his ignorance of what his Father has in store for him, or of the manner in which He will receive him, to resolve nevertheless to arise and go to Him ? Do not wait then for more light, more knowledge, more faith, more good, ere you go to God ; but go at once to Him as you are, and pour out your heart before Him. "He is not far from any one of us ; for in Him we live and move and have our being ; for we are also his offspring." "Return to the Lord *thy* God ; *for* thou hast fallen by thine iniquity." *Take with you words*, and turn to the

Lord and say, "Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously."

2. *We must pray with Truth.*—"God is a Spirit," and therefore we must not worship Him with the mere outward forms or words of worship, but "worship Him in spirit and in truth." Such worship "the Father seeks." He demands reality.

Now there are two ways in which we are very apt to be unreal, that is to say, unspiritual and untruthful in prayer. One is by "saying our prayers,"—that is, using the words of prayer, without ever thinking of God, or of addressing Him at all. But "words without thoughts never to heaven go." Such prayers are not only useless, but profane. They are not mere forms, but actual falsehoods. They profess in words to mean something, while in the mouth of him who utters them they mean nothing.

There is another way, akin to this, in which we may pray without any sincerity or truth, and that is by using right words, and attaching to them some real meaning, and thinking of God too as we pray, but yet not truly and sincerely believing what we say. It is thus that we may praise God while in our hearts we may have no admiration for his

character or his ways. We may confess sin in the language of penitence and contrition, without experiencing either. We may ask to be delivered from sin, when we have no intention whatever of forsaking it, and use the language of humble and earnest request for spiritual blessings which we have no wish whatever to possess. Nothing may be more orthodox, becoming, or beautiful, than the words of such prayers. They have but one defect—they are words only.

Let us therefore be sincere. Let us believe what we say, desire what we ask, and feel what we express. If we thus pray thoughtfully and sincerely to-day up to the measure, however small that may be, of what we know, believe, and wish for, the Living God will hear us, and to-morrow we may believe more, and desire more. God can feed us only according to our hunger, yet He will quicken our hunger even by his very supplies, so that we shall ever hunger the more after Himself, and the more be satisfied. Truths which were at first unseen will by degrees shine out of the darkness as our eyes are opened to perceive them. Jesus Christ in all his glory will arise, and soon the whole universe will be full of light. But sincerity,

truth, and reality before God are essential to our receiving any good, much more to our being led unto all goodness and "truth as it is in Jesus."

3. *We must pray with Hope.*—I mean with the hope of being *answered*. No man can pray truly, earnestly, or perseveringly without hope. The hope of being heard is involved, indeed, in real faith and godly sincerity, and it reacts upon both, and gives intensity to both. The more faith the more hope, and the more hope the more faith. Without hope our prayers will be cold, dead, purposeless—no sooner uttered than forgotten. We cannot ask, seek, and knock without hope of receiving, finding, and of its being opened to us. Prayer would be a mockery and a delusion unless there was a positive giving on God's part, as well as asking on ours. There is no such thing in the long history of God's kingdom as an unanswered prayer. Every true desire from a child's heart finds some true answer in the heart of God. Most certain it is, that the prayer of the Church of God since creation has not been the cry of orphans in an empty home, without a father to hear or answer. Jesus Christ did not pray in vain or to an unknown God, nor has He spoken in ignorance of God or of

his brethren when He says, "Ask, and receive the answering of prayer, that your joy may be full."

4. *We must pray for what is according to God's will.*—"This is the confidence," says the Apostle John, "that we have in Him, that if we ask anything *according to his will* He heareth us."

Now you know that there are many things which cannot possibly be according to God's will, and for which therefore we cannot pray. We could not ask God, for example, to bless us in any evil undertaking, to help us to swindle, to pardon our sins without repentance, to give us peace in wickedness, to save our souls without a Saviour, to give us glory without giving us godliness, or to give us godliness without his Holy Spirit, and without prayer, watchfulness, and self-denial. Such requests would not be according to God's will, and God therefore would not grant them, as it is "impossible for God to lie" or to contradict his own nature.

There are also many things not in themselves evil which yet we cannot know to be God's will—such as that we or others should recover from sickness, or have a prosperous journey, or obtain deliverance from danger or suffering. These and similar petitions are not *contrary* to his will,

and may therefore be made in prayer;—for everything which may be lawfully desired, may be asked for from God, with this reservation only —“*if it be thy will!*” And having thus prayed, we should abide in peace, knowing that his will being always guided by perfect wisdom and love, is ever one with our good, and that if it be for our good, or the good of others, He will give us that very thing which we have prayed for.

But remember that there are many more things, and those involving the highest and choicest blessings to ourselves and others, which we *know* are “according to God’s will.” We know, for example, that it is the will and the wish of God, that every man should possess that divine life which consists in the knowledge and love of Himself; that consequently He wills every man to believe in Christ, and repent of sin, and receive forgiveness, and be sanctified by the Spirit, and bring forth the fruits of the Spirit,—in one word, to be a saved man by being a godly man. There is not indeed one good or perfect gift which any of us *ought* to possess, which it is not God’s will to bestow. We may therefore have the full assurance of faith that God will hear such prayers, for they are verily “accord-

ing to his will." In regard to all others, however, we must ask of God in that spirit of holy submission which inspired our blessed Lord when He said, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me ; but not my will, but thine be done !"

THE ANSWERING OF PRAYER.

As to *the manner* in which God may answer our prayers, that depends upon his own wisdom and love. He may refuse what we ask, because we ask in ignorance. If a child asks a serpent, thinking it to be a fish, the father will in mercy refuse his request—saying, "Ye know not what ye ask."

And God may hear our prayer by granting us something very different from what we desired, yet something much better. The Apostle Paul prayed the Lord *thrice* that He would remove the thorn in his flesh, and that the messenger of Satan which buffeted him, might depart from him. His prayer was answered ; not, however, by the removal of the thorn, but by the assurance of strength to bear it, and to be perfected by it. "He said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee ; for my strength is made perfect in weakness."

And God may not hear our prayer for a long

time, but yet hear it at the best time for us. Therefore “men ought always to pray, and not to faint,” for God will hear his own elect who cry to Him day and night, “though *he bear long with them.*” Nay, the answer to some prayers may be deferred until after the death of the petitioner, who in heaven only will learn how he was heard and answered. Thus the prayers offered up by Jesus while on earth, are being answered in every age of the world. Many a child receives blessings in answer to prayers offered up by the dying parent long years ago. But it is impossible for us to specify the many *ways* of the Lord as the Hearer of Prayer. Let us, however, be assured, that there are no facts more certain in the history of men of prayer, nor to themselves more familiar, than that their prayers are answered; and that, whether or not we can recognise the answer, God *does* hear us,—granting what is asked according to his will, and giving us (it may be in our darkest hour) the rich and sustaining blessing of his peace.

Be not, therefore, careful or over-anxious about anything, as if your heavenly Father did not know you, nor care for you; “but in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let

your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus !”

PRAYER.

PART II.

*"And when ye pray, say, Our Father which
art in heaven," &c. &c.—ST. LUKE
xi. 2.*

I DESIRE again to address you as simply and directly as possible on the subject of prayer. I have no original thoughts to offer upon it; my only wish is to explain what I believe to be God's will regarding this duty; to remove, if I can, one or two practical difficulties in the way of its performance, and thus, if possible, to induce those who have never prayed to begin to do so now.

SEASONS OF PRAYER.

(I.) *Public Worship.*—Every Christian acknowledges it to be a duty to worship with the Church upon the Lord's-day. The Church is a Christian

society, whose members profess to believe in Jesus Christ as their Saviour. As a society, those who believe in God have met, probably from the beginning of the world, for his worship, and all like-minded will continue to meet from age to age for the same high and blessed object, until Christ comes again. One day in seven has been consecrated for worship since a community existed to worship. Before Christ, this day was the seventh; since his resurrection it has been the first day of the week. The worship of the Church below is in fellowship with the Church above, and is a foretaste of the spiritual good which will be fully experienced by the glorified Church, that will be one with Christ in holiness and joy for eternity, as He is one with God. But it is distressing to think how few heartily join in this public worship of the Church. I am persuaded that very many who regularly come to Church have never once in their lives joined in its public worship. This is not owing to the want of a liturgy,—that is, printed prayers, which all can read, and all can use in common; for, although I believe a liturgy to be in many cases very helpful, and, to those who have been accustomed to it, almost necessary for public

worship, yet how often do even those who use a liturgy content themselves with the "form of sound words," as if their use secured some good, as by magic, while there is no thought of God as the hearer of prayer, nor any real sympathy between what their hearts really desire and their lips speak. Their listless gaze, or apathetic, irreverent expression, reveal their prayerless spirit. The very same indifference is manifested in congregations where extempore prayer is offered up by the minister. It is sometimes the case, alas! that this prayer may be such as no earnest soul can join in. It may be very meaningless both to preacher and people—dead, lifeless, and unreal—an extinguisher of the spirit of prayer; so that it is no want of charity to suppose that, in such a case, every one, minister included, wishes it were done, and no one expecting an answer! But even when the prayer of the minister is from the heart, and an utterance of what men truly desire who truly pray, yet many even then, it is to be feared, neither join in it nor perhaps even hear it, but are gazing round the Church, their minds apparently occupied with the most trifling, irreverent, and worldly thoughts. And thus God may see many a congre-

gation meeting Sunday after Sunday professedly for worship, without one real prayer ascending to Him from any one of its members ! “ They come before me as my people come, but their hearts are far from me.”

No wonder such congregations remain cold and dead ; without spiritual life ; without growing in grace or in knowledge ; and without interest in anything pertaining to the kingdom of God. They receive not, for they ask not ; they ask not, for they are self-satisfied : “ Thou sayest, I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing ; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.” And it is now as when our Lord was upon the earth ; He cannot do many mighty works because of our unbelief !

(2.) *Family Prayer*.—The family is a Christian society :—a little church, as it were, in the house, the parent being, as Christ’s representative, its king to rule over it, its priest to intercede for it and offer up its spiritual sacrifices at the family altar, and its prophet to teach it by word and life.

Is it too much to expect that once a day the

family should meet together for prayer, supplication, and thanksgiving? Is there not much to thank God for, much to intercede for, much to confess, much to ask? When any great anxiety or sorrow enters the house, how natural does prayer then become! No one objects to it, or thinks it a strange thing; but all welcome it as in harmony with the circumstances of the family. But why should God be so often associated with mere sorrow? Why does every one think of Him when darkness comes, and forget Him when the sunshine dawns? Why do so many send for Him in their time of need, as they do for the physician; but in the one case as in the other, dispense with his presence when they think they can get on without Him?

Family prayer has this advantage among others, that it affords a daily opportunity to every member of the family of praying reverentially before God. This is of immense importance where, from want of accommodation, opportunities for private prayer do not exist in the house. At family worship all within the house can kneel before God their Maker, and worship Him.

Many a man would like thus to pray with his

family, who nevertheless feels what appear to him to be insuperable difficulties in the way of its performance—nervousness, timidity, want of words, or the power of expression, and the like. I believe such difficulties to be very sincerely and painfully felt; though I also believe them to be far more easily overcome than those suppose who have never made an honest attempt to do so. It is wonderful how an earnest heart loosens a trembling tongue. I never knew a peasant who could not manage to speak out his mind to a peer when anxious to obtain some favour from him, more especially if he was sure of getting it for the asking. So, too, the most uneducated and timid woman will find words, and the most appropriate words too, perhaps the most eloquent, with which to address a crowded court of justice in the hope of obtaining pardon for her criminal child. Always remember, and it will help you to overcome this difficulty, that what we require for worship is not long prayers, nor learned prayers, nor prayers with certain formal expressions, but *earnest* prayers, that is, prayers from children to a father, for what we really want.

And let me say to those who wish to pray with and for their families, but who complain of their

inability to express themselves aright, that they should use forms of prayer. Those who are in the habit of using a liturgy in church can easily use a portion of it in private or family prayer. Every man may use at least the Lord's Prayer. Nay, more, if in family worship you seriously repeated the Lord's Prayer only, it would be a great advantage to the members of your household, more especially if you permitted them at the same time to kneel in silence for a few minutes, that each might have an opportunity of praying in the secret of their own hearts to God. Surely any of these methods would be better than no prayer at all!

I shall never forget the impression made upon me during the first year of my ministry by an artisan whom I had visited, and on whom I urged the paramount duty of family prayer. One day he entered my study, bursting into tears as he said, "You remember that girl, sir—she was my only child. She died suddenly this morning: she has gone, I hope, to God. But if so, she can tell Him what now breaks my heart—that she never heard a prayer in her father's house or from her father's lips! Oh that she were with me but for one day again!"

(3.) *Private Prayer*.—This brings me back to what I have already said regarding prayer,—that it is the duty of every man to pray in secret in every possible circumstance of life, so long as reason is left to him. “When thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret, and thy Father which seeth in secret will reward thee openly.” It is every one’s duty to pray in secret; but if no opportunity can be obtained for this, prayer should not by any means be neglected. Let me here notice, and if possible help to relieve, a difficulty which we have all felt,—that of praying in the presence of others—as when travelling, or being obliged to sleep in the same room with other people. This difficulty may arise from the fear of man, of being thought hypocritical, of pretending to be better than other people, or of condemning others by our example, and so exciting their dislike to us. All of us, I dare say, have yielded many a time to such temptations, and have acted a mean and cowardly part in so doing. Alas that any Christian should be ashamed of Christ! The heathen and Mohammedan might in this respect condemn us, for they are not ashamed to confess

their faith, such as it is, before the world. I have often been struck in the East by seeing the Mussulman worshipper spread his carpet on the deck of the steamer, amidst the crowd at the railway terminus, by the road-side, in the field or in the busy bazaar;—anywhere, in short, when the stated hour of prayer summons him to kneel. No doubt it is far more difficult to do that which is real, than to do that which is a mere form. But why should not prayer, for our own sakes and for the sake of others, always be performed wherever possible? While many are not ashamed to profess themselves servants of sin, Christians, and sincere Christians too, often seem ashamed to confess Jesus Christ openly. This, my brethren, ought not to be.

DIFFICULTIES IN PRAYER.

There are other practical difficulties which hinder prayer which I would here notice. And first I would speak of one which almost involves every other—the absence of any sense of need—the feeling that we can do without prayer. Is it not so? Now the fact is, alas, very certain, that we *can* do without prayer. There is no necessity whatever for prayer in order to live to self and

without God. If a man resolves to do his own will, he need not pray to be able to do it. If he is inclined to be covetous, proud, vain, selfish, earthly-minded, and devilish, he may very easily gratify his inclinations without prayer. Nay, more, it is quite possible that without prayer he may possess what he calls life:—health, wealth, strength, amusement, literature, science, art. He may without prayer be able to work, make money, and spend it as he likes best. If he is a coward, he can lie; or if a lazy man, he can neglect his work; or if a thief, he can steal. True, prayer hinders all this sort of devil's life, and imbues the man with a Christian life. Prayer obtains grace for repentance, deep sorrow for the past, good intentions, earnest endeavours, and successful achievements for the future. In short, if he prays, he may be a saint; but if he wishes to be a sinner, then the less he prays the sooner will he get his wishes accomplished. It is therefore true that there is no reason for our praying, but every reason for our not praying, if we wish to be wicked. On the other hand, if we desire to escape out of this hell of sin, and to be brought into heaven, by heaven being brought into us, then assuredly this cannot be accomplished

without prayer. We cannot be pardoned, renewed, and made meet for heaven, without the grace of God. God's grace, though always freely given when sincerely asked, is never given when proudly despised.

You say, perhaps, when urged to pray, and say very truly, that you have not the right spirit, and that it would be hypocrisy for you to pray to God; and therefore that of the two evils, hypocritical prayer, or no prayer, the last is to be preferred. But why should evil of any kind be chosen? Why not pray to God for the right spirit? It is through prayer that God helps us to realise the want of the soul, and quickens in us the hunger and thirst which He alone can satisfy. Did it ever, moreover, occur to you that prayer is pleasing to God, irrespective of any particular good you may receive from it, except the good of enjoying fellowship with Himself? Remember that it is not all the same to Him whether you pray or not; for prayer is not the homage which weakness pays to strength, but the return of love for love.

Another difficulty which I have known some men make is—want of time for prayer. “We are too busy,” they say, “to pray; every day and hour is

occupied." Did you ever, my brother, reckon the time which prayer occupies? You may easily make this experiment. Any morning, before going to your work, read, for example, slowly and thoughtfully, the Lord's Prayer in the 6th chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel, and try and pray it as you read. And when you have done this, read to the end of the chapter, and then count how many minutes you have occupied of your valuable time. Also consider, for as many minutes more, what Christ has been teaching you in those verses, and what God your Father in his infinite love has permitted you to ask in that prayer, and promised to give you. And then, as a being with common sense, and as an immortal being with a soul to be saved and with every talent to answer for, say if you can—if you dare—that you have spent too much time out of the twenty-four hours over that Lord's Prayer, and that portion of the Lord's word! Rather kneel down and ask forgiveness for the years that you have spent without any affectionate thought of your Father in heaven, or any prayer to Him. The busiest man on earth may pray. If sincere and honest, he can always command time to satisfy the hunger of his soul, and to find rest for his spirit,

just as easily as he can find time to eat or sleep. He can lift up his heart to God in the midst of the storm at sea, or the roar of battle; in the crowded street, or the busy market-place. Havelock during his terrible march to Cawnpore, when every day was a desperate battle, never neglected prayer. "He was not continually," says his biographer, "in the outward act of prayer, but he liked somehow or other to be alone both morning and evening, that he might worship and bow down. When on his heaviest marches it was determined to start at some earlier hour than that which he allotted to his devotions, he arose quite in time to hold undisturbed his usual fellowship with God. He lived and died declaring that where there is a will there is a way." So was it with another man who, if not busy in the camp, was busy in the senate. The great and good Wilberforce was eminently a man of prayer; yet never, perhaps, lived a man whose time was more fully occupied by difficult and responsible labour. How often do such words as these occur in his diary during his busiest time: "Secured an hour for private devotions."

It is great hypocrisy in any living man to say that he has "no time" to pray to God. Surely

God never gave time to any creature to be occupied by what made prayer and fellowship with Himself impossible.

PARTS OF PRAYER.

Prayer is often divided into several parts—adoration, confession, petition, intercession, and thanksgiving. It is not implied that no prayer is right or acceptable which does not include all those parts. For every prayer is right which is the real expression of a longing soul seeking after God; even should it be as short as that which was offered up by the Apostle Peter when sinking into the depths, and which contained but three words, “Lord, save me!” But the sincere soul naturally, as it were, pours out its emotions and desires before God along those channels which I have specified. The song of the heart rises to the throne of God in those harmonious chords. For, when we have entered into our closet and shut to the door, a voice seems to stir us up to express our thoughts according to this holy plan.

“Knowest thou nothing,” the voice seems to say, “in God, to excite thy praise and adoration of Him? Is there indeed no beauty to attract thy heart? Seest thou nothing in his glorious character,

or in all He has been to thee and thine; in all He has done for thee as Creator, as most merciful and daily provider, and as the Redeemer of thy soul? nothing in all he has promised to thee, to call forth some expression of heartfelt adoration?" Would it be constraint to speak his praise, or would it not rather be in accordance with thy gratefulness, however weak, to say, "Praise the Lord! Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his gracious benefits!"

"Hast thou nothing to confess? Canst thou know Him at all as thy Father, and behold Him as He is and has ever been to thee, and not see thyself in this light of holiness and love to be poor and needy, blind and naked? In his love dost thou not see thine own unloving heart; in his mercy thine own ingratitude; in his holiness thine own villainess; in his righteous authority thine own rebellion; in his promises thine unbelief; and canst thou be silent? Hast thou nothing to confess that is a sad memory to thee, a darkness which doth cloud thy soul as death; and sins more than can be numbered, which it would be unutterable relief to cast off?

"Hast thou nothing to ask from God? Is no

forgiveness of sin needed ; no deeper penitence, no peace of heart ; no moral strength ; no Holy Spirit to guide thee, uphold thee, comfort thee, and make thee meet for heaven ? Is nothing required for soul or body, for time or for eternity, which God alone can give thee ? Hast thou nothing to ask for others ; nothing for those dear to thee whose evil and whose good are as thine own ; no intercession for thy country or for thy people, for thy brethren of mankind or for the Church of God ? Art thou so selfishly separated from all, as to care for none but thyself or art thou not rather bound up with all for good or evil ?

And hast thou nothing to thank God for ; no mercies to acknowledge, bestowed on thyself and others ? Is thy life without a gift from God ? or are not thy days since childhood full of numberless mercies received, though never asked and never acknowledged ?”

Thus does a voice come to us to quicken us, when, in ignorance of God or of ourselves, we may be tempted to think that we need not or cannot pray with a full and free heart to our Father. Yet again, I say, wait not until you think you are able to pray thus. Whatever else you propose to do in

the future, begin to pray now. Speak according to the necessities of your being; and prayer, like every other habit, will be strengthened by use. You will experience a growing wonder, an increasing freedom, a deepening peace in prayer; a greater sense of good received and good required, all of which will not only be the results of prayer, but inducements to it.

“Pray without ceasing.”

“Lord teach us to pray.”

And when you, my beloved friends, thus pray, God will hear you, and so answer you that you will know that He has answered you. You may not be able to prove this to others, but you will be convinced of it yourselves. And when you realise the fact that God Almighty really hears and answers your prayers—your weak, doubting, half-believing prayers—this will fill your souls with deepest awe, reverence, and love; and will convince you as nothing else can, that verily *you* have a Father in Heaven. With David you will now exclaim, “I love the Lord, because he hath heard the voice of my supplications.”

PRINCIPLES OF CHRISTIAN TOLERATION.

*"Him that is weak in the faith receive ye,
but not to doubtful disputations," &c.—*

ROMANS xiv. 1-23, xv. 1-7.

THE Apostle Paul, in the fourteenth chapter of his Epistle to the Romans, teaches principles of Christian toleration which the Churches of Christ require to learn in the nineteenth century as much as they did in the first ; for in this as well as in all other departments of Christian duty, the lessons taught in God's word are far in advance of our practice.

The questions, let it be observed, with which the Apostle had here to deal, and on which he gives his judgment, were not between believer and unbeliever, Christian and non-Christian, the Church and the world, far less between the Church

and its authorised teachers; but they were between members of the Church, or between those who were within and others who sought admission into the Christian Society. The Bible does not indeed leave us in ignorance as to the sentiments we should cherish towards even “a heathen and publican” who “denies the Lord,” either by profession or practice. But in this chapter the Apostle had before him brethren only, and what he says has reference to the duties towards each other of those who, while differing as to what the will of their Lord was in some things, yet agreed in the essential principle of submission to his will in all things.

Let us “hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches” :—

“Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations.”

It is comparatively unimportant for practical purposes to determine at present whether this receiving of one weak in the faith, alluded to his reception into the fellowship of mere personal friendship, or into that of the Christian Society, the Church. I believe it has reference chiefly to

admission into the communion of the Church of which the Lord's Supper, as a Social Feast, is the visible sign. In either case, St. Paul assumes that faith was the uniting bond, inasmuch as that which united men to Jesus Christ ought to be sufficient to unite them to each other. Communion with Christ first through faith possessed, then communion with the Church through that faith confessed in words, and by life.

Weak faith then, if real, was to be recognised as well as strong faith: for there are lambs as well as sheep in Christ's fold; babes as well as strong men in his "House." In the exercise of that discipline or government which is essential to a Church if it is to be a society, and not a mob or mere multitude of individual units, there must be some test of membership. Faith in the Redeemer, in all He has done, taught, and promised, as revealed in the Scriptures, is the test. Let him, therefore, who has this faith be received as a brother. But when you have received "him who is weak" into communion, it must not be for "doubtful disputations"—to sit in judgment upon him as to those matters about which, being weak, he has in the mean time doubts, but doubts

not inconsistent with faith in Jesus Christ. He is not to be received into a den of wolves to be torn in pieces, but into a fold of sheep where he may go in and out and find pasture for his soul. He has not learned all your lessons, perhaps; but is he willing to learn—to sit humbly at Christ's feet, hungering and thirsting to be taught the whole truth? He is not strong; but he is alive, and recovering from the fatal disease of sin, through faith in the Divine Physician. And if so, let him be received and made stronger and better by Christian fellowship.

In the following verses we have examples given us of how weak faith manifested itself in that period of the Church.

“For one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs.”

This dispute had reference either to the ascetic practices of some Jews; or to the doubtful propriety of joining in the family feasts connected with idol worship, and alluded to at greater length by the same Apostle in his First Epistle to the Corinthians (Chap. x. 25–33); or to the lawfulness of eating meat “sold in the shambles,”

which might first have been offered up to an idol, to secure its favour and blessing. However it was, some Christians with a good conscience partook of the flesh meat which others for conscience' sake avoided.

Now the Apostle does not assert that the singularly scrupulous and "conscientious" person was consequently a singularly good and pious man. He was a brother indeed, because of his faith, yet a "weak" brother, because of his scruples. Well, how were these two parties to act and feel towards each other? Should they of necessity come to one opinion, or have different "communion"?

"Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him."

As we might interpret the words:—"Let not him who eats flesh meat despise his brother who does not, or think his conduct so unworthy of the good sense a Christian should possess, and the liberty he should enjoy, that he can have no toleration for him. On the other hand, let not him whose scruples reject flesh, condemn his brother who shares neither his scruples nor his

‘herbs,’ as an earthly-minded, self-indulgent man who prefers his meat to his master and his dinner to his duty.” And why not? “Because God hath received him!” And if so, why should you reject him? That God has received him, you must in charity assume, because he professes to have received Christ and to obey Him. And on the same ground, you also should receive him to the glory of God.

“Who art thou that judgest another man’s servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand.” Yes! God is able to make him stand, though you may be disposed to put him down. The strong are thus warned not to crush a weak brother, but to be fellow-workers with God, who is holding him up; and the weak are warned not to judge another man’s conscience by their own, and encouraged also by the thought that there is an unseen arm of power on which they may lean and which is able to make them stand. But without the faith that worketh by love, the weak are just as likely as the strong to become tyrannical and intolerant—perhaps more so, as it is a characteristic of weakness to believe itself

strong, while all real strength, on the other hand, is obtained through a sense of weakness,—“when I am weak, *then* am I strong.”

But another example of difference among Christians both in opinion and practice is adduced by the Apostle.

“One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike.”

This difference may have had reference to the keeping of Jewish feast-days during that transition period when the Church was growing out of Judaism into Christianity, and which ended in the letter, if not in the spirit, with the destruction of Jerusalem; or it may have had reference to the keeping of the Jewish Sabbath. On this point Jew and Gentile Christians would naturally differ. We have no divisions now in the Church, in the Protestant Church at least, upon “meats and drinks.” Few brethren have been so weak as to make their tests of communion opinions upon what are called “vegetarianism” or “total abstinence;” but we have differences about days. Some sections of the Church keep Feast-days and Saints’-days as holy and binding upon conscience, while others keep

the Lord's-day only. Some again differ as to the grounds on which even the Lord's-day should be kept holy, and these necessarily affect their sense of duty as to the right manner of keeping it. Some believe that the fourth commandment is still the law of the Church in its letter as well as in its spirit. Others again keep the first day of the week as the Lord's-day and not as the Sabbath. Their reasons for doing so are chiefly derived from Apostolic example, which they hold to be binding on the Church, as expressing indirectly the mind of Christ; and from the necessity of the Christian Church meeting for public worship, which would be impossible without a fixed day. To these and similar considerations they add the historical fact that one day in seven has been set apart for worship ever since the Church of God existed as a visible society, and that no changes in man's circumstances or character render a day of rest and worship less necessary for him now than in any other period of the world's history. But in so far as the Jewish Sabbath is concerned, with its peculiar and special restrictions, they consider it abrogated.

What is the solution of the difficulty? How

does the Apostle reconcile the opposing parties? "Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind!" He desires *conviction*, not selfish, vain, proud self-opinionativeness, or differing for the sake of differing. Each man was to be persuaded in his own mind, and not because of the persuasion in another man's mind. In this way alone, by each person first seeking after truth, could true unity of sentiment ever be reached. Personal truthfulness and responsibility, exercised by all parties or *parts* at first, could be the only means of their ever becoming one party or *whole* from conviction at last.

In the mean time the Apostle teaches that, while differing in *practice* about "meats" and "days," all might nevertheless be one in *principle*. How could this be?

"He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord, for he giveth God thanks; and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not, and giveth God thanks."

Observe here how two Christians may, on reli-

gious grounds, and actuated by precisely the same loving desire to please God, act very differently as to some observances. One man “regards the day”—why?—as “unto the Lord,” and to please Him. Another “regardeth *not* the day”—and why?—as “unto the Lord,” and also to please Him; One man “eateth” (the flesh meat), and with a good conscience, for he “giveth God thanks.” Another “eateth not” (the flesh meat), and he has an equally good conscience, for he too “giveth God thanks!” Both act differently, but both act honestly before God, and seek as obedient servants to do their Master’s will. Both are influenced as Christians by one common principle of life, while yet differing in its application to some points of duty not clearly revealed or clearly seen. What is this principle by which all Christians are thus actuated? In what one essential point is the true Catholic Church of Christ one? Let us hear it: “For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord’s. For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived,

that He might be Lord both of the dead and living."

These are the confessions of the living Church of Christ of all time and of every land. "None of us liveth to himself!" The "self," with all its self-willing, self-seeking, self-pleasing, and self-worship, has been crucified and buried with Christ. To Him we live. "We are the Lord's!" We are not our own, but bought with a price. Jesus by his death and life has obtained possession of us, and we of Him. "For to this end He both died, and rose, and revived, that He might be the Lord both of the dead and living!" Therefore we Christians are willing not merely to give up this meat or drink for his sake, but to give up our lives for Him.

But if this be true of every real Christian—if what is termed the headship of Christ, or his right to govern every man, is a doctrine involved in the fact of his existence; if no Christian denies it,—or he would thereby cease to be a Christian,—how do we presume to condemn a brother who differs from us, not in this essential principle, but only in its application? It is culpable ignorance, weak vanity, or spiritual pride,

which refuses to see the difference between rebellion against Christ's will, and rebellion against our interpretation of his will ; or which confuses these two things, the obligation of every Christian to obey whatever Christ has commanded, and the obligation of each Christian to determine for his own guidance *what* He has commanded. And no man can charge another with denying this essential principle, merely because he differs from him in some application of the principle. What saith the Apostle? "But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ. For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God. Let us not therefore judge one another any more : but judge this rather, that no man put a stumbling-block or an occasion to fall in his brother's way."

You will have observed that the Apostle has not yet told us what his own judgment was in regard to the points in dispute. Ought Christians,

for example, to make any difference between clean and unclean? To this he replies—"I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself."

Notice on what the Apostle's knowledge was founded in giving this decision. It was not a mere fallible opinion or judgment, such as any synod or church council would be able to give now-a-days, when they could decide only "according to the best of their judgment," or "as far as they could discover" from the word of God, or even from the teaching of the Church. But while Paul was beyond doubt an infallible teacher, what was even his decision on the points in dispute? "I know," he says, "and am persuaded *by the Lord Jesus.*" And what did he thus know? "That there is nothing unclean of itself." And now perhaps, arguing from our own habits of thought, we might be disposed to think that the Apostle would have forbade, with all authority, any opinion or practice in the Church which was in any way contrary to "the mind of Christ." Many now-a-days would probably reason thus:—"If he who makes no difference on religious grounds between meats and drinks is right, it follows that

he who does so is wrong. In the Christian Church nothing erroneous should be permitted. Let us therefore either exclude such persons from our communion, or withdraw ourselves from theirs, and form a Church on 'right principles.' The Apostle, however, says nothing like this ; but adds, "To him that esteemeth anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean!"

It is not unclean to me, he says, but it may be unclean to you ! There is here no contradiction between principle and practice. The principle is, that all should walk in the light of Christ ; the practice is, that each should walk in accordance with his measure of light. He will have no man walk blindly, or be led by the hand, but every man to see for himself, and to walk as he sees. The former method would be mechanical, the latter only is spiritual. The one can make no real progress, for "he knows not whither he is going ;" the other sees, though he may see dimly, yet is certain to see more and more clearly. To-day with his weak sight he may indeed think something to be unclean which is not so, but as his vision strengthens he will soon in Christ's light see that "there is nothing unclean of itself."

The "strong" have in the mean time a duty to perform to the "weak." They are not to put stumbling-blocks in their way. They are not to make their liberty in Christ, whether as to days or no days, meats or no meats, minister to selfishness, which is verily *not* of Christ, by injuring a brother whom Christ loved so much that He died for him. We are, in the exercise of the love which "seeketh not its own," to consider not our own enjoyment, but the *good* of our brother in everything. There is honourable work here given to the strong because they are strong to perform, and that it is to carry the burden of the weak. The strong possess a *good*, a greater measure of good than the weak, but they are to make it a higher good still by so using it that the weak shall not mistake their good for evil and as such speak against it.

So much for these and like differences of opinion. But when they are settled, what, after all, is their importance in themselves? They are questions about the scaffolding only, not about the building; about the variable and accidental, not about the abiding and essential:—"For the

kingdom of God is not meat and drink ; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men."

What blessed words are these !—that kingdom which God has established is not meat and drink—it does not consist of such things as perish in their using—it is spiritual and within us. It is "righteousness,"—that righteousness about which the Apostle had written in the previous portion of the Epistle, the righteousness *by* faith, and from faith, the righteousness which justifies, and is itself the righteous condition of a soul towards a righteous-loving God. It is "*peace*," peace from righteousness, peace with God, peace of conscience, of the affections, and of the whole man. It is "joy in the Holy Ghost ;" such joy as He alone can impart and does impart through "faith," be it weak or strong. "He who in *these* things serveth Christ is acceptable to God !"

What strength and consolation to the Christian amid the strife of tongues and the confusion of opinions ! He who serveth Christ in *these* things—in righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost—not in other things, which however good

and perfect as gifts coming from the Father of Lights, we may be unable either to receive or to understand,—but in “*these* things,” which every man may possess who asks them of the Lord of Righteousness, Peace, and Joy,—such an one is “acceptable to God!” Many other things may be profitable, these only are essential. Every man who possesses “these things” has entered into the kingdom, or what is the same thing, the kingdom has entered into him, for the Lord reigns over every province of his being. Oh! that these words might ring through the whole professing Church of Christ! How would they reveal to us true friends whom in our darkness we mistake for foes, reconcile differences, give due proportion to all questions, increase our reverence for things essential and eternal, and lessen our passionate strivings for things variable and temporary, and help us to subordinate all we do to the one glorious end of advancing the kingdom itself—of Righteousness, Peace, and Joy—in our own souls and in the souls of others!

The conclusion to which the Apostle comes is what we might almost have anticipated from

those principles. "Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may *edify* another. For meat destroy not the work of God."

This is not peace at any price, as the phrase is, but the seeking of genuine peace by the exercise of genuine self-sacrifice. It does not sacrifice the inward to the outward, the end to the means, as all do who sacrifice religion itself, while disputing about religion, or about the means towards religion, or the manifold forms in which religion before God may express itself—questions on which men may differ now, as they have differed since the days of the Apostle, and may possibly differ till the millennium, yet all the while be equally conscientious and equally acceptable to God.

The remainder of the chapter need not be dwelt upon; yet a few hints may be profitable as illustrating not merely the principle of toleration, but of self-sacrificing sympathy.

"All things indeed are pure," for "what God has cleansed call not thou common." The living plant may convert all things created and approved

by God into means of life, beauty, and fruitfulness. "But it is evil for that man who eateth," or does anything else "with offence," that is, believing it to be wrong, and therefore making that which might possibly be allowable and safe in another, a cause of stumbling in himself, with his present light. "And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because *he eateth* not of faith: for whatsoever *is* not of faith is sin." This teaches us to sacrifice the use of things perfectly lawful for us, when such use would occasion a brother's fall into sin. It expresses the great law of Christian love by which everything non-essential though allowable must be sacrificed to the *good* of others. "All things are lawful for me, but not expedient." "Hast thou faith?" Can you with quiet confidence in God do or enjoy this or that which weak brethren condemn? So be it. But do so before God, and not in circumstances in which a weak brother may be injured. "Happy is he that condemneth not himself" but feels justified in doing "that which he alloweth" from his sense of Christian liberty. But when you, on the other hand, weak brother, cannot with a good conscience do what another brother doeth, *refrain*

from doing it. It may be allowable for him, but it is not, with your present convictions, allowable for you. Do not condemn him, for he may be strong—the Lord knoweth!—but do not follow him if *you*, whether weak or strong, think it unlawful. “For he who doubteth is damned if he eat,” because it is sinful to be in the habit of doing that which *we* believe to be against the will of God. “Whatsoever is not of faith is sin.” Confidence in God, and in the lawfulness of your actions, either as being in accordance with, or not opposed to the will of God, are essential to integrity before God. You may be a weak, ill-informed man. If so, become free, strong, and well-informed; *but in the mean time* act up to your given light. Be true to *that*: for such truthfulness is the condition of your being led into all truth.

In these remarks I do not plead for the toleration of what we believe to be error when held by even a Christian brother—for I profess but to expound the teaching of St. Paul. But let us tolerate the Christian brother himself, and seek to free him from error, and lead him into all

truth; and not seek to excommunicate him from our Christian fellowship so long as he professes faith in Jesus as his divine infallible Teacher, his all-sufficient Saviour, and in the eye of charity is seeking to know and to do his will. Some one may allege perhaps, that while professing this faith he denies this or that doctrine which we all believe to be of fundamental importance. But is it quite certain that he does so merely because he denies our views of it, or the arguments by which we establish it, or the conclusions we draw from it, or our opinion of its relative importance? Must he be held as rejecting a truth, if he rejects our explanations of it? Is it certain that we are right and our brother wrong, on any other ground than that we ourselves have so decided? Are we more humble, prayerful, thoughtful, and conscientious than he?—or more obedient to Christ's teaching in his word and by his Spirit? Are we more gifted with spiritual insight? We are believers in Christ. So is he. We study the Bible and cry for light to understand it. So does he. Would we rather die than consciously disobey Christ, or misinterpret his Spirit? So would he. Yet he may be wrong! So may we. He may

be influenced more than he is aware by party spirit, prejudice, and pride. So may we !

What, in such possible circumstances, ought we to do ? Differing in taste and judgment about some parts, or single notes, in a great oratorio which we both enjoy, or in regard to some features in a vast landscape that fills us both with wonder—shall we, in order to agree, submit to some Pope, who will bid us shut our eyes and ears, give up our taste and sense of the beautiful, and say amen to all his decisions ? Should we not rather seek to improve our respective tastes, and in the mean time mutually tolerate our few differences, and together enjoy the many glorious things which we see in common and are our life ? Yes, verily ! Let us each draw nearer to Jesus Christ—each learn more of Him—each be more earnest in prayer—each strive to be more humble and obedient—and in this way, if in any, we shall be brought nearer to each other and learn the same truth in the end.

“ Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded : and if in anything ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you. Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained,

let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing."

Let us hear "the conclusion of the whole matter" as contained in the beginning of the fifteenth chapter:—

"We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification. For even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me. For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope. Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus: that ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. *Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God.*"

THE END OF THE YEAR.

*"Abide with us: for it is toward evening,
and the day is far spent."—ST. LUKE
xxiv. 29.*

THE short history in which these words occur is one of the most beautiful and instructive in the Gospels. On the evening of the resurrection day, two disciples were journeying from Jerusalem to the village of Emmaus, situated somewhere in its immediate neighbourhood. They were not of the twelve, and the name of only one of them is known to us. As they walked along the road, they conversed about the wondrous event which perplexed and distressed them. The death of Jesus as the Messiah was to them an inextricable riddle. It crossed all their previous beliefs, and seemed as a wall of adamant opposing all their

hopes. His reported resurrection was if possible still more mysterious, and irreconcilable with all that had been, or was ever likely to be. What did it mean? What was the truth about it? They knew not! All they knew was that nothing had happened according to their anticipations and hopes, although these were built apparently on the surest and most certain grounds. In the mean time, they were going home utterly confused and cast down in spirit.

As they pursued their Sabbath journey, a stranger suddenly joined them, and asked, "What manner of communications are these that ye have one to another, as ye walk, and are sad?" Then those simple men, amazed at the seeming ignorance of the stranger about matters with which the whole city was ringing, answered, "Art thou only a stranger in Jerusalem, and hast not known the things which are come to pass there in these days?" And He, without declaring what He knew or did not know, but wishing to draw them out, the better to prepare their minds for what He had to impart, asked, "What things?" And they, thankful, I doubt not, to get out their hearts to any one who would hear their story, and thereby get some relief to their sorrow, told Him concerning

Jesus of Nazareth—how He was a prophet mighty in deed and in word before God and all the people—how the chief priests and the rulers of their own nation had delivered Him to be condemned to death, and had crucified Him—and how they themselves had up to that moment trusted that it was He who should redeem Israel. And now, strange to say, on this the third day after these things were done, certain women of their company had made them astonished, who had been early that very morning at the sepulchre, and had not found his body, but said that they had seen a vision of angels who declared that He was alive! nay more, some of the company had gone to the sepulchre and had found it empty, even as the women had said.

Such was their simple story. And was it indeed all over with Jesus and with Christianity! Was that living One extinguished? Had He reared false hopes which were never to be fulfilled, and kindled a love in human bosoms which was to be like an earthly affection only, a thing of memory until its object was met in another and purer world? Was all this marvellous history of the last three years—this history of wonders done before the living God

and living men—a phantasm only, a delusion, a dream, ended amidst wounds and blood and death on the hill of skulls, and of corruption in the rich man's tomb? Oh for light! but whence shall it arise?

On the first evening of Adam's life, with what wonder must he have beheld the sun, which had filled the world with beauty and glory, suddenly sink in the west, leaving thick darkness, which concealed all Eden from his eye! What were his thoughts and perplexities during that first midnight in human history! Whatever they were, they were all ended by the same heavenly luminary rising again, as a bridegroom from his couch of gold and curtains of every gorgeous hue, to pursue his course along the fields of the azure sky. Thus rose the great Sun of Righteousness, the mighty Bridegroom of the Church from the grave, bringing light and life from the most unexpected quarter to his benighted and desponding people. "Blessed are they who wait for the Lord as those who watch for the morning!" This blessedness was experienced by the disciples: for it soon appeared that the mysterious Stranger was not ignorant of the things which had taken place in Jerusalem. Suddenly

turning to his fellow travellers, He uttered those strange words, "Oh fools, and slow of heart to believe! Ought not Christ to have suffered these things and to have entered into his glory?" And then He appealed to those Old Testament Scriptures which we now possess, and opened them up to men who, as pious Jews, knew their letter at least, if they did not as yet understand their deeper teaching; and He showed how Moses and the Psalms and the Prophets, by word and type and symbol, all spake of the Christ—all gave one testimony that He must suffer the very things which puzzled them—that He must have entered into his glory by the grave. Hence their very difficulties in believing Jesus to be the Messiah were turned into arguments in favour of it; the very things at which they stumbled were just those things which ought to have happened if Jesus was what he announced Himself to have been. Their hearts began to burn and glow with new hope and joy, as his words, like the very breath of Heaven, fanned the flame. Can it be that the death, burial, and resurrection of their beloved Jesus of Nazareth were Heaven's own signs of the Messiah for whom they and the nation had longed? Oh glad thought! it

seems too good to be true. Their hearts burn, but their lips are silent. One thing only they feel, an attachment to this Stranger, a longing to know more about Him, to hear more of this new truth from his lips, to have their doubts for ever dispelled and their faith confirmed in all they wished to be true.

And now they have reached their destination. The Stranger made as if He would pass on: for He will again test their faith, and prepare them to receive the fulness of the blessing. Ah! they cannot part from Him; they must see more of Him. He has been an unspeakable comfort to them in their sorrow, and so they constrain Him, saying, "*Abide with us: for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent.*" Be our guest, share the hospitalities of our lowly home. "And He went in to tarry with them." The simple meal is spread, and all meet around the table. The Stranger takes bread, as if He were the head of the house, and "blessing it, He brake it, and gave it to them." The sign is thus given that the Living Bread is there,—that it is not dead,—that it has been offered for the life of the world, and "that whosoever eats of it shall never die." In the midst of this light of

truth thus brought to their remembrance, Jesus revealed Himself, and vanished from their sight.

We pursue this beautiful narrative no further, reminding you only how these men immediately returned to Jerusalem, though "the day was far spent;" and found the disciples met, and rushed into the room with the glad tidings that their Lord was risen indeed; and then how they all met Jesus again, for "as they spake" He entered, saying, "Peace be unto you."

I admit, besides, that there was no necessity for my dwelling so long upon this history as a mere introduction to the small portion of it which I have chosen as the subject of a few practical reflections for the ending of another year; but the narrative is itself so instructive that I could not help going over it somewhat in detail. One feels how true and real it is, giving us a wondrous insight into the hearts of the humble disciples and of Jesus on that day of all days in the world's history; and revealing to us the surpassing glory of our Lord. While the narrative is strictly historical, yet, like all the narratives of Scripture, it is a revelation of truth for all time, and for all persons, showing as it does the relationship betwixt Christ and his people.

What I wish to do this evening is to consider the prayer of the disciples as expressive of our own wishes. "Abide with us: for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent."

"Abide with us!" How can we presume to offer up such a request as this to the Lord Jesus? And yet I beseech of you not to lose the unspeakable blessing which this teaching of our Lord is designed to impart, for unless Jesus Christ can as truly "abide with us" as He could have done with those men; unless you and I can know Him, hold real communion with Him, speak to Him, and have in some form a true answer from Him; unless He can enter our dwelling, and know the members of our family, and sympathise with all that concerns us; unless He can be to us a real, actual friend, such a prayer as this, "Abide with us," must evaporate into a useless sentiment—a quaint conceit—a cry as meaningless as if offered to sun, moon, or stars, or to the gods of heathendom. And so I beseech of you to stir up your minds and make an effort to realise this as true, and as being to you the most important and most blessed of all truths,—that Jesus of Nazareth though ascended up on high can yet abide with us here below.

I do not wonder at the Popish doctrine of the real presence. It is a wrong and false way, no doubt, of satisfying what is the craving of the soul in its loneliness—to have Christ near us, with us, in us. But I sympathise much more with the man who in his darkness clings to this shadow as a real substance, than with him who, possessing light, cares neither for substance nor shadow, but is satisfied with himself only. We believe and know, however, that as surely as Jesus walked with those disciples of old along that old beaten road, he can in very truth walk with us through the crowded thoroughfares of the city or along country by-paths; that as sure as He walked with those unlearned and ignorant, yet very true and honest working men on that Sunday evening, so will he walk with any of us now who desire his company; and that as sure as He crossed that lowly threshold and sat down at that scanty table, and revealed Himself to that poor household, so surely will He be with us, however humble our occupation, however humble our abode. This is my belief, for I know it to be true; it is the belief of the Christian Church; and must be the belief and experience of us all. Therefore do I preach it to you in love and hope.

It is not difficult for us to apprehend what is meant by Christ "abiding with us," or to attach a real meaning to his words, "Abide in me, and I in you," so as to give an intelligent and hearty Amen to the prayer, "that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ would strengthen us by his Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in our hearts by faith." It cannot be that we who know what it is to confide in an earthly friend, to tell him all our secret being,—to cast our care on him as one who careth for us, to rely on his sympathy, advice, and all that he can give,—it cannot be, I say, that we are unable to comprehend what is meant by our doing all this to Jesus. What is needed in order that we may possess this personal experience and make our actual life harmonise with our theoretic belief? What but *real* faith in Jesus! Without this He is unreal, far away, a dream, a shadow, a word; but with faith such as millions have or have had, He will be to us a person abiding in our hearts and in our homes; abiding with us in time, in the shadow of death, and throughout eternity, "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." And if we have a Lord who will thus "abide with us," shall we not constrain Him with

longing hearts to do so?—shall we not sincerely utter the prayer, “Abide with us: for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent?”

Consider in what circumstances this prayer may be offered with peculiar propriety. We may do so, for example, in *the evening of life*. The day is far spent with many who hear these words. It is far spent with the old. The shadows of the long night are rapidly closing around them, and darkness already conceals old faces and old scenes from their sight: the path along which they have journeyed is becoming dim and shadowy: they can hardly see their work; and the time is swiftly approaching in which they can work no more. They have comparatively few to sympathise with them. The young, whose life is so much in the future, cannot easily understand those whose life is so much in the past. The old have a far greater power of living in sympathy with the young, than the young have with the old. The grandfather can easily enter into the feelings of his grandchildren, and see his own past life reproduced in their life, and understand them, as they cannot understand him. The one has had experience of youth; but

the other has had no experience of old age. "The Ancient of Days" alone can sympathise with the aged patriarch. There is in the old age of every thoughtful man a solemn sense of time lost that never can be restored; of noble opportunities bestowed for good sadly neglected, of an evil influence exercised, by coldness, indifference, and unbelief in days gone by, and that, too, upon souls who have long ago departed to give their account to God. And the aged know also that they have received mercies more than can be numbered, which have not been appreciated; and experienced sorrows that have not been sanctified; and heard teachings from which they have learned nothing. These reminiscences ever and anon fitfully flash across the wintry sky of their memory, awakening penitence and longings for the dawning of a new and eternal day. And then there is the solemn thought, that in a very few years at most, this world will have passed away for ever, and their eternal destiny have been decided. But whether their past life has been spent on the whole well or ill; whether they are able by the grace of God to look back on a life which, in spite of much darkness, has been illumined by the light of Christ; or whether their life—oh,

terrible and distressing thought—has been without God or Christ in the world, yet, blessed be that patient and loving Saviour, they can yet offer up a prayer which, if it only comes from the true heart, will be heard and answered:—“Abide with us: for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent.” If thou hast never known Jesus, old man or old woman, as thy friend and companion, oh let the prayer ascend as from the very depth of thy great necessity—“Lord, come to us now! Enter into our hearts. It is true that we have shut Thee out for many a day, and welcomed thine enemies and our own. We have admitted the devil, and the world, and the flesh, but they have deceived us, and given us no peace. We are alone and solitary, and weary of ourselves and of our ways. Blessed Lord! thou hast stood long at our door, weeping and knocking, summer and winter, and we shut it against thee; oh, enter now, and deliver us from all our enemies; cast out every wicked spirit, for thou art stronger than they. We have sinned—sinned against heaven, and before *Thee*. We have been without Thee in the world. This has been our sin, our condemnation. But, good Lord, have mercy upon us! In mercy through thy Spirit enter our

home, convince us deeply of sin, show to us the vile idols we have worshipped and obeyed; come and cleanse the house and fill it with thy glory; come, heavenly light, and shine in our hearts, that the outer darkness may not receive us with its everlasting night."

On the other hand, there are old Christians who have long possessed Jesus in their hearts. They have given Him indeed a poor entertainment, and have not cultivated his blessed society as they ought to have done; yet in looking back on life, they remember nothing with so much delight as His entrance into their dwelling. Whatever they repent of, they repent not of that. They bless and praise Him for having dwelt with them so long, and for all the strength and comfort He has given to them and theirs; and now that the evening of life has come and their day is far spent, their prayer will doubtless be, "Abide with us." Do not, I beseech of you, think that there is no more work for you to do on earth. Were it so, you would not be permitted to remain here. But the trees of righteousness bring forth fruit each in their season, and in old age. It is yours to bring forth the fruit of gratitude for the

past, of love for the present, of hope for the future, and of faith at all times. To you may be given the blessed privilege of affording an example of penitence, of patience, of cheerfulness, of prayer, of unselfishness, of beneficence. By what you say, by what you do, by what you give, by what you teach, you may glorify the Lord ere you die, and do a work on earth which you cannot do in heaven. Let the young learn from you who have wellnigh ended your journey on earth, what a way of pleasantness and of peace the Christian life is from first to last. Let the young see in you the faith, love, hope, and joy of the second childhood of the new heart. If the aged bad man is like an extinguished volcano which bears no healing herb or sweet flower, but is dark and barren, covered by the ashes of a heartless life, or scarred by the fires of old passions long ago burnt out; the aged good man is like a tree planted by the nourishing stream of the grace of God, which has yielded its wholesome fruit throughout successive years, and been a shelter from the heat and storm to many a family group and many a weary pilgrim.

Aged Christian, let this be your prayer—"Abide

with me ! Forsake me not in old age. Be my staff on which to lean for strength, my pillow on which to repose for rest, my light to guide my tottering steps when my vision fails and all other lights grow dim. God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, God of my fathers, abide with me in Jesus Christ thy Son !”

And we may also offer this prayer with peculiar propriety in *the morning of life*. Many there are who enter life with hopes of honourable ambition never to be fulfilled ; with prospects of their occupying worthy places in society, cultivating their talents, blessing their friends, and sharing with some dear object of their affections the sweet and holy enjoyments of a happy home, yet who are marked by the signs of an early death, and destined soon to pass away as if they had never been, except to a few loving hearts. Young men and women, knowing not but your sun may be like that which rises in the northern sky hardly appearing above the horizon ere it departs, let me beseech of you to offer up this prayer to your blessed Lord—“ Abide with us, for the day *may* be far spent.” You need his aid as much

as the old ; for depend upon it each of you, even the youngest who can understand right from wrong, what pleases from what displeases Jesus Christ, have a work to do in your little day ; and that day, however short, is given you by the Good Master, and is therefore quite long enough for all *•your* work. I cannot tell you what that individual work may be which you alone can do, whether as a child, a companion, a friend, a son or daughter ; but I pray you to ask that the blessed Jesus may abide in your hearts, and He who knows the heart of a child and of a young man, seeing He himself grew in wisdom and in stature, will teach you what you ought to do while you live, and will enable you to do it well until you die. Abide in Jesus as your present help and friend, and then, though your day may be far spent, it will be so far improved that the work given you to do will be finished to the glory of your Master.

Again : this prayer may be offered with peculiar propriety in *the manhood of life*, for the day of grace is passing away from us all, and the night cometh in which no man can work.

I suppose that all of us realise in some degree the rapid passing away of time as each year draws to its close. A year is a large deduction from our life, which is short at best, and is ordinarily measured by threescore years and ten. When we add together the many years spent during the period of infancy; the years passed in sleep, making up one in three of all we live; the years necessarily spent in relaxation from fatigue, and in preparing the body for labour, it is most impressive to mark the few which remain to the busiest man to finish his work on earth and to prepare for eternity. And considering the short time thus allotted to us, who does not feel oppressed by the thought of all that might have been accomplished, had we been only conscientious in improving our gifts and talents, in becoming better ourselves and in making others better and happier! And who will not ask with seriousness, how all this life shall be finished as a whole? How shall we meet our Lord, and see the books opened, and read our autobiography, and give an account of the deeds done in the body, and take our place according to our works in an eternal unchangeable abode? Blessed be

God, the day of grace is not yet ended, though it is speedily ending! Every beat of our pulse shortens it; every sunset diminishes it by a day; every new year by a large portion of our existence. And what shall our prayer be as the sun is declining in the west, for us perhaps to rise no more? What shall our prayer be as we pace slowly but surely nearer to the open grave? What shall our prayer be at a time when we cannot choose but feel how many persons and things, enjoyments and pursuits, abide not with us, but pass away, vision-like, though they were once so intensely real? Does not this prayer meet our wants, "Lord, abide with us! Whatever else departs, do Thou Thyself remain. Abide with us, that we in Thy sight and from the very glory of Thy presence may repent ourselves of the unworthy and unprofitable past; abide with us, that through faith in Thy blood we may have peace through Thee; abide with us, that we may redeem the time that is yet given us, so as to be more true and simple, more earnest and believing, more brave and manly, more prayerful and self-denying, more loving to Thee and Thine; abide with us, O Lord, that

when the shadows of the last evening close around us and our day of grace is over, we may have Thyself as our strength and comfort in the valley and shadow of death; abide with us, that we, never being separated from Thee, may be satisfied with Thy likeness when we wake from our momentary slumber of death, and be with Thee and Thine for ever!"

Who can tell what may yet come to us! The night of a great sorrow may come,—the loss of all our earthly sunshine and of those who made the world so delightful to us; the night of poverty and want, or bodily weakness and pain; or the night of a clouded intellect, when reason may wander in darkness, and "the servant of the Lord see no light." It may be that the ministering angels can say at this moment with reference to some of us, "Their day is far spent, and to them their dark night is near." If this be God's will for you or me, let our hearts say Amen! but O let us in such dark nights have the consolation of a present Saviour—a consolation which He will not deny to any who, in their sense of weakness and of utter incapacity to guide or help themselves, will constrain Him, saying, "Abide

with us ! Lord, thou Man of Sorrows, abide with us in our sorrow ; thou Treasure of the soul, abide with us in our poverty ; thou Divine Physician, abide with us in our sickness ; thou Lord of light, abide with us in our mental darkness !” And He will do it. Yes, verily fear not : and though the world may not see Him, yea, though for a time He may veil Himself from his true disciples, so that their eyes may not behold Him, yet He is nevertheless with them, and the hour shall come, here or in another world, when they who trust Him and hold Him fast shall see Him and all his glory unveiled, and be able to exclaim from their own blessed experience, “The Lord is risen indeed !”

And now, looking at the whole of this narrative, how naturally do we turn from whatever difficulties or doubts may beset us, to the Lord, who alone knows what is each man’s individual and secret burden. How strengthening to contemplate that same Jesus with us here as He was with those disciples going to Emmaus. Only think of the circumstances of that appearing ! The Lord Jesus had that day risen from the

dead. It was the most remarkable moment in the history of the world, and a centre-point of history for ever. The man Christ Jesus had entered the unseen and eternal world, new to Him as a man; yet, in the might of that perfect love which seeketh not her own, and which carries a brother's burden, He returned to the earth. Could not the day of the resurrection—that first Sunday of the world—have been spent as a jubilee day in heaven? Might it not have been enjoyed by the second Adam—the seed of Abraham—the son of David—the prophet like unto Moses—with the saintly kings and prophets who longed to see his day and to see himself? Was there not a host of redeemed spirits waiting to make the vaults of heaven vocal with the jubilant song of praise and welcome, “Open, ye everlasting doors, that the King of Glory may enter in!” Yet upon that very day he returns to the earth, “very early” in the morning, and remains walking among his old familiar haunts and with his old friends in the quiet majesty and patient calm of Divine love. He spends the first Sunday of the Christian dispensation in works and labours of charity: He appears in the morning, in the evening, and at

night to his disciples. He goes not to the temple, nor flashes the glory of his presence over Jerusalem, nor thunders above the house of Pilate, nor disturbs the sleep of the high priest, or of Barabbas the robber, who was freed that He might be condemned ; but he sends a message of comfort to the weeping Peter, speaks words of sympathy and hope to Mary and the pious women, walks with two lowly working men along the dusty highway, interprets the Scripture to them like an every-day evangelist, partakes of their humble meal ; and if he leaves them, it is only to appear again to them and to his friends who in fear were assembled in the upper room of Jerusalem, with the message of "Peace be unto you !"

Thank God for such a revelation as this of Jesus Christ ! It is unspeakably touching, meeting all the wants of our humanity. It is Divine love beyond all conception—all utterance ! I am more thankful for such teaching than for all else in existence. It assures us that though "fools and slow of heart to believe," yet that this Prophet will not reject us ; that though we are nothing in the great world, yet this Jesus will walk with us and enter our homes ; that though for a

time we may not know who is with us, yet He will in his time and way reveal his presence and interpret those burnings of the heart which softened and soothed us when we knew not who had kindled them; that though the day is far spent, yet we need not fear the night, however dark or mysterious it be, for we have Jesus with us—Saviour and Brother, who will “abide with us,” and never leave us! What need we more to have peace in remembering the past and in anticipating the future? “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want: yea, though I walk through the valley and shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me: surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever:”

“Lord, abide with us!” Amen.

EARNESTNESS.

“And he went through the cities and villages, teaching, and journeying toward Jerusalem. Then said one unto Him, Lord, are there few that be saved?”

&c. &c.—ST. LUKE xiii. 22-30.

WE are not informed who that “one” was who put this question to our Lord, nor in what spirit, or for what end it was put. A Sadducee, who denied the doctrine of future rewards and punishments, and the very existence of the soul after death, may have asked it, with a desire to entangle our Lord in debate: or a proud, self-righteous Pharisee, who, sure of his own salvation, was anxious, perhaps, to expose before the people what he deemed to be the un-orthodox views of Jesus, regarding the number and character of those who should be saved: or some one whose conscience

had been roused by the teaching of our Lord and was oppressed by a sense of what appeared to him to be the almost unsurmountable difficulties of salvation: or, it may be that the question was prompted by a vain and idle curiosity, which desired to be wise above what was written, or to play with truth, as with a toy, for a little amusement or excitement during the passing hour.

But if it is unimportant for us to know who put this question, it is all important to perceive how Christ replied to it: He said unto them, "Strive to enter in at the strait gate!" He does not give the answer which either the infidel, the hypocrite, the anxious inquirer, or the curious, anticipated or desired; for He does not say how few, or how many, are saved; but He gives the answer they all needed, and was most profitable for them. He withdrew their attention from what they could not know, to what they ought to do. They wished to know about the salvation of others; He wished them to attend to their own. They would look into the book of God's counsels; He would have them look into their own hearts; as if He had said, "With the number of the saved you have nothing to do; but with your own salvation you

have everything to do. Instead of spending your time in asking, 'Are there few who shall be saved?' rather spend it in 'striving' to be saved yourselves." We are thus taught, not only the folly of seeking to be wise above what is written, and of asking questions which God has not been pleased to answer; but more especially the necessity of our settling this first and greatest of all questions, "What shall we do to be saved?" before occupying our attention with others which may only pertain to religion. There are many questions deeply interesting to a believer, which are profitless to an unbeliever; nay, worse than profitless, because they may occupy his mind to the exclusion of the one thing needful; and just because those questions are *about* religion, and form the subject of much earnest thought to serious Christians—the very fact of a man thinking, speaking, and inquiring about them, may deepen in his mind the delusion that he is himself religious—that they concern him who is seeking, because they concern him who has found. Oh! what is the settling of all other questions to us, so long as this question remains unsettled, of our own salvation,—our faith in Jesus Christ!

Let us try to realise the full meaning of these words, "Strive to enter in at the strait (or narrow) gate, for many will seek to enter in, but shall not be able."

If you turn to the Gospel of St. Matthew (vii. 13, 14), you will find that Christ speaks of two roads and two gates. These are pictures of two different states of mind, either of which must possess us. There are not three roads, but two only; because it is impossible for us to be other than either good or bad—spiritually alive or dead—"in the flesh" or "in the spirit"—in "the kingdom of Satan" and of "darkness," or "in the kingdom of God's dear Son" and of "light." (Read Romans viii. 1-17; Gal. v. 16-26; Ephes. ii. 1-22.) Therefore Christ speaks of two roads only;—the one is broad; that is say, it is easy for the wicked to walk along it; all they have to do, being to follow their own sinful wills in everything. The entrance to this broad road is wide, admitting every traveller even with his burden of the world and of his lusts; and "many" accordingly "go in thereat?" The other road is narrow; it requires care and attention to walk along it, yet is easy and pleasant to the new man. The gate of entrance is also

narrow; but wide enough for the poor and needy—the little children who “can open the door with no other key than the cross:” but this is against mere flesh and blood, and accordingly, “few there be that go in thereat!”

“*Strive*,” says our Lord, “to enter in at the strait gate: for many shall *seek* to go in thereat, but shall not be able.” Now, you will observe that Jesus does not say, “many shall *strive* to enter in, but shall not be able,”—He says, “many shall *seek*,” teaching us that the chief reason why men do not enter the narrow gate of salvation, and obtain rest, is, that they *seek*, but do not *strive* to enter in. It is not difficult to understand what is meant by striving, and how different a thing it is from mere seeking. Only notice the conduct of any one who, in real earnestness of soul, desires to obtain any good; you will perceive in his conduct this striving, and not mere seeking. Look at the student, plodding over his books late and early; reading, examining, thinking, writing; he is striving to obtain learning. Look at the man of business, buying, selling, calculating, counting his profit and loss, speculating about markets and investments, poring over his ledgers and accounts, giving his whole

heart to business,—that man is striving to get rich. Look at the sick man, consulting doctors, trying cures, swallowing the most nauseous medicines, submitting to sore operations,—that man is striving to get health. Look at the sailor, whose ship has foundered in the great deep; look at him and his weary companions toiling at the oar in their small boat,—hungry, thirsty, faint, labouring for days and nights amidst stormy winds and angry seas, to reach, if possible, the nearest shore,—those men are striving to save their lives. In all those cases, we recognise men who are in earnest. Now, be assured, that if any of us, with the same sincerity, wished to possess a saving knowledge of God's truth—to obtain the riches of Christ—to enjoy the health of the soul—and to lay hold of eternal life, we should have the same earnest striving. You can see quite well that mere seeking would not give the student knowledge—the merchant riches—the sick man health—nor the sailor life; and how, then, will mere *seeking*, without striving, save your souls?

“Many shall seek!” Yes, who among us is so dead, so indifferent to the future well-being of his immortal soul, as not to “*seek*,”—not to do some-

thing to obtain salvation? Some will talk about religion, or read the Bible occasionally, or repeat a meaningless prayer, or go to church; and others will trust to their morality, their profession, their orthodoxy, and the like; all will do something in order that they may, at least, be safe. "Many will seek!" It may be when sudden death strikes down an acquaintance—when a mysterious pestilence sweeps away its victims—when sickness enters the family, and some beloved one is laid on his dying-bed, or in his lonely grave; or, it may be, when the sinner himself is arrested by a dangerous illness, and realises the nearness of God and the certainty of judgment; when, in the silence of night, he recalls his past life, and all God's dealings towards him, with all *his* dealings towards God. In such seasons as these, the careless sinner will look, with interest and concern, for that narrow gate which he more than suspects is, after all, the only entrance to a path of pleasantness and peace; and he may feel a wish to enter in, nay, resolve to do so, and blame himself for his off-putting and folly in not having done so before. He "*seeks* to enter in!" But when he finds that this implies an entering into himself of a new mind and spirit—a "putting

off the old man with his affections and lusts"—a putting away iniquity, and a putting on "the new man, created after Christ Jesus to new works;" that, in short, as a sin-loving and a sin-keeping soul, the gate cannot admit him and all his burdens:—then does he refuse the Cross as the only key. To "give all diligence to make his calling and election sure," to "labour to enter into rest," to "work out salvation with fear and trembling,"—in one word, to sacrifice self, and to accept of Christ, for free pardon, and new life—all this requires not *seeking* only, but *striving*; whereas the slothful think to get all by seeking only. Oh! how necessary is our Lord's solemn command and warning,—"*Strive* to enter in, for many shall *seek* to enter in, but shall not be able."

Our Lord proceeds to say, "When once the Master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door," &c. He Himself is the master of the house, "whose house are we, if we hold fast our confidence." He invites and commands men now to enter into his house by the strait gate and narrow way; He invites them to sit down with Himself and his many guests, to enjoy holy com-

munion, refreshment, and repose. But the time, at last, arrives, when the door of the house is shut, and shut for ever. This is the period of judgment—that period of solemn trial—when the righteousness of Christ's dealings towards every man will be made manifest upon evidence before the assembled universe. Then will those who refused, during the day of peace, to enter in by the narrow door, “begin to stand without, and to say, Lord, Lord, open unto us!” The scene is at last changed. Formerly Christ had been seeking entrance into their house—even the house of their hearts, saying, “Behold I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear my voice and open the door unto me, I will come in unto him and sup with him, and he with me.” But they were too slothful and wicked to open the door to Him. Now they seek admittance into his “Father's house,” and to the marriage supper, and stand without, crying, “Open unto us!” But Christ's door is for ever closed against them! And why? Because, unless we abide in Christ by faith now, we cannot enter heaven and abide with Christ hereafter: for there can be no fellowship with Christ—no union or communion with Him and with his people—without

fellowship of spirit, affection, character, oneness of heart and will. 'To "open the door" to us without this is impossible ; and this character those mere seekers have not, and the time for obtaining it has passed away. "I know you not," is his reply. "We are not friends,—we are not one. I am holy ; ye are workers of iniquity."

In the first chapter of Proverbs, verse 28, we have the same solemn picture presented to us, of the sinner's "calling on God" when too late, but getting "no answer,"—"seeking Him," but "not finding Him ;" and being permitted "to eat the fruit of his own ways, and to be filled with his own devices," because "he hated knowledge, and did not *choose* the fear of the Lord." God saves us from hell by saving us from sin ; he gives us heaven only by giving us the knowledge and the love of Himself. And when men, at the last day, cry to God, it is not the cry of children seeking a parent, but the cry only of those who have "a fearful looking for of judgment,"—those who seek deliverance only from the terrible consequences of their walking in the broad way of sin ; but who, nevertheless, hate the holiness and self-denial of the narrow way, as much as ever. They

are “not born again;” they want the right mind and heart; and so, “they cannot enter the kingdom of God.”

“Then shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets.”—Such is the pleading of those lost sinners—such their reasons why the sentence of condemnation should not be pronounced against them; as if they said, “We are not astonished that Thou shouldest shut out those infidels who never acknowledged Thee; but we ever called Thee what we call Thee now,—‘Lord.’ We wonder not, that those who never heard, or never would listen to thy Word, should be rejected by Thee; but ‘we have heard Thee teach,’ and have regularly attended to a preached Gospel. They who from indifference to Thee would not remember Thee at thy sacramental feast on earth, may be refused admittance to thy marriage-feast in heaven; but we have eaten and drunk in thy presence,—‘Lord, Lord, open to us!’” Does the Lord deny all this? Does He say that they speak untruth? By no means. All this they could truly say, and even more than this; for, as we read in another

Gospel, many, like Judas, will come at that day, and say, "Have we not cast out devils in thy name, and in thy name done many wonderful works?" But what will all this prove? It will prove that they had gifts, but not that they had grace; it will prove that they were *seeking*, but not that they were *striving* to enter in at the strait gate. Oh! what a solemn warning is here given to the professing members of the Church of Christ! What profession may exist without principle! How much we may *do*, and yet never *be* right with God! What good may be done by us, and yet no real good be in us! How much seeking without any earnest striving! For observe, those who could say, and, for aught that appears, say with truth, that they possessed such privileges, and performed such works as those, were, nevertheless, known to Christ, only *as workers of iniquity*. "I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity." (Read 1 Cor. xiii.)

"There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." The broad way, which began with "eating, and drinking, and making merry," ends with "weeping

and gnashing of teeth ;” for “there is a way that *seemeth good* to a man, but *the end* thereof is as the ways of death.” What is the immediate cause of this sore agony? It is “seeing Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and themselves thrust out.” But why should a sight like this produce such bitter sorrow? Because every patriarch and prophet was a witness against the sloth, self-indulgence, and indifference of the mere *seekers* after salvation. All of them had entered in through the narrow gate—all had obtained the promises “through faith and patience”—all had “come out of much tribulation,” and “endured a great fight of afflictions,” and had carried their cross and despised the shame. In one word, they had been *striving* and not *seeking* merely : and the very sight of those men of God, and the remembrance of all they had been, and had done, while on earth, carries home to the hearts of the vain and wicked “seekers,” the stern conviction, that their condemnation is just ; that those holy men had resisted temptations to which they had yielded : had overcome difficulties by which they were repelled ; had pushed on in spite of obstacles from

which they had shrunk ; and, with fewer means and opportunities, and, it may be, with greater temptations and difficulties, had entered that gate of self-denial which they, in their miserable sloth and wickedness, thought so narrow, that they turned aside from it for the broad and easy way of fleshly self-indulgence.

What worker of iniquity, what slothful and unprofitable servant, in these days of Gospel light and privileges in which we live, can excuse himself for his impenitence, when he beholds such servants of the Most High God in his kingdom? Had the patriarchs more light than we now possess? They lived during the dawn, we beneath the meridian splendour of Revelation ! Were they called to an easier life than ours? or to the performance of labour which required less faith, less self-sacrifice, less crucifying of the flesh, than God has assigned to us now? Was it so with Abraham, who left his country, and lived a stranger in a land amidst idolaters, and, at God's simple command, offered up his only son, whom he loved? Was it so with Moses, who preferred to suffer affliction with the people of God, rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season?

Was it so with Daniel, who accepted the lions' den with God, rather than the palace without Him? Was it so with that cloud of witnesses mentioned by St. Paul in the 11th chapter of the Hebrews? Read the chapter, ye slothful, and even now be silent, and find no excuse for your indifference! even now you may weep with shame and sorrow at your want of likeness to those faithful servants, with whom you vainly hope, in your present state of ungodliness, to live for ever! No wonder if there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth hereafter, in seeing such men in God's kingdom, if you are thrust out; for this conviction must overwhelm your spirit,—that if they found the gate in the morning twilight, you might easily have found it in the noonday brightness; that if they carried such heavy crosses, and pursued their solitary but patient journey for so many years along the narrow way, you might have carried your lighter cross, and pursued your easier and shorter journey, amidst the companionships of the Christian Church, and the manifold blessings of the latter day—if only, like them, you had loved God, and had been in earnest! But you were slothful, and “workers of ini-

quity ;” so you must feel that you deserve to perish !

“They shall come from the east and from the west, and from the north and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God.”—Not in vain has the Gospel been preached by faithful missionaries ! In spite of the slothful, who would not enter the gate themselves, and who, consequently, cared not though the whole world should follow their example ; in spite of all the arguments and opposition of the enemy,—a multitude greater than any man can number, of all nations, and kindred, and people, shall sit down at the marriage supper of the Lamb. The redeemed “from the east,”—that mighty host which shall have been gathered to Christ, from the days of “righteous Abel,” down to the last convert in Hindostan or China, shall all mingle with the multitude who shall pass to glory “from the west,”—the increasing numbers of the vast American continent. “They shall come from the south !” —The south seas have already furnished many guests ; and many more from those clustered and far-spread islets and island-continent, shall mingle

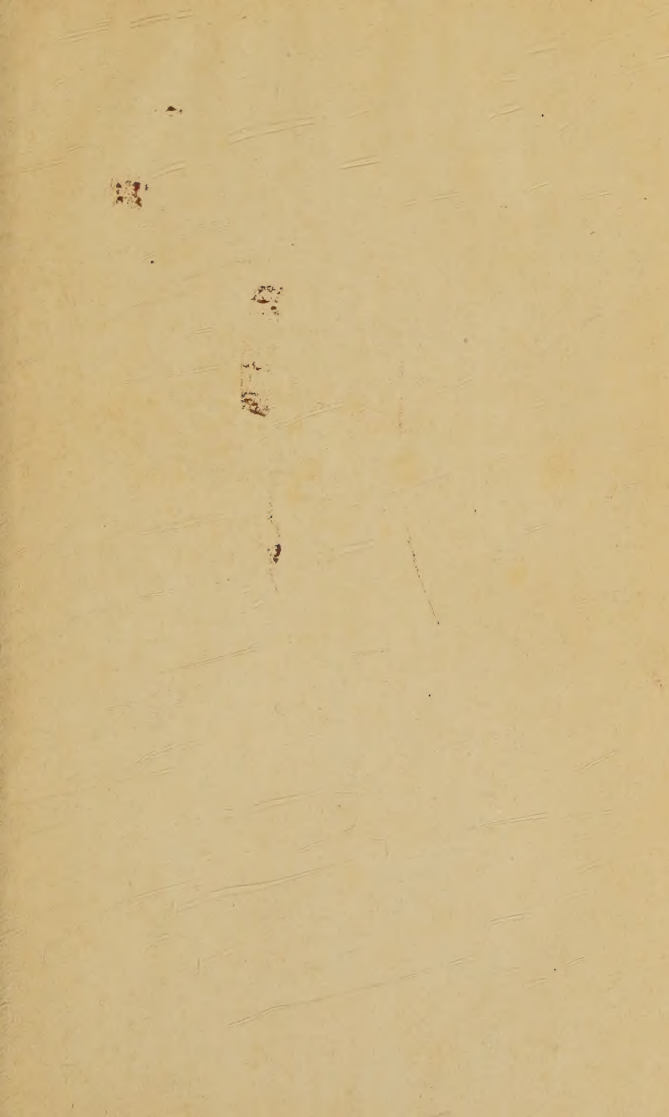
with the African negro, and with the cultivated European, and with the lonely Esquimaux and Greenlander, who shall “come from the north:” and the “one family” shall sing with one heart this new song of praise to the Redeemer,—“Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood; out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made us, unto our God, kings and priests.” “Let the redeemed of the Lord say so whom he hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy, and gathered them out of the lands from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south.” And when we read, even now, the history of God’s work among the heathen, and “see what He hath wrought,” and what has been accomplished in them and by them—what battles have been fought, and victories won by them, over long accumulating ignorance and superstition—what agonising partings with kindred have been endured—what sacrifices of body and soul have been made in holding fast to duty—what steadfastness, amidst opposition, has been manifested; and when we contrast this earnest and laborious striving of those who have been “last” called to the know-

ledge of Christ, with the sloth and indifference, the carnality, covetousness, prayerlessness, and hardness of heart, of those who have been “first” called; who cry, “Lord, Lord,” and “hear Christ teach,” and “eat and drink in his presence,” yet are, after all, mere seekers, and, in God’s sight, “workers of iniquity;”—then do we already understand how those who are accounted last now, shall be first then; and how those who vainly think themselves first now, shall be last then; and how our Capernaums, where Christ teaches daily, may, because of their unbelief in the midst of their boasted privileges, receive, at last, a more dreadful condemnation; and though now “exalted to heaven, be thrust down to hell!”

Let us learn, then, to be in earnest, if we would possess true religion, or any good! Let all mere formality, empty talk, outside profession, and pretence, be banished from us. Let us never forget that we are, truly, just what God knows us to be; and that having a name to live will not save us (though it may deceive us), if the heart-searching God, who cannot be mocked, sees that we are cold formalists—empty pretenders—slothful hypo-

crites—dead! May God quicken us more and more through the Spirit of Life which was in his Son! May He deepen on our souls a sense of our responsibility—increase our faith in the reality of things unseen—awaken in us a more abiding conviction of the necessity of solemn earnestness, in making our calling and election sure; that, in his sight, we may all, not only seek, but “strive” to enter in at the strait gate, and to walk along the narrow path which leadeth unto life!

THE END.



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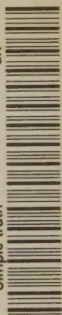
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